The China Convergence

Yes, the West is becoming more like China. Here is the real reason why.

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Well, actually...

I do believe this is the longest thing I've ever written, but also the most important. Read with a stiff drink. – N.S. Lyons

Differences and tensions between the United States and China have never been greater. The whole world is dividing itself between the blocs of these two opposing superpowers. A new Cold War is dawning, complete with a global ideological "battle between democracy and autocracy." Freedom is on the line. The future of global governance will be determined by the winner of this extended competition between two fundamentally opposed political and

economic systems – unless a hot war settles the question early with a cataclysmic fight to the death, much as liberal democracy once fought off fascism.

This is the simple and easy narrative of our present moment. In some ways it is accurate: a geopolitical competition really is in the process of boiling over into open confrontation. But it's also fundamentally shallow and misleading: when it comes to the most fundamental political questions, China and the United States are not diverging but converging to become more alike.

In fact, I can already predict and describe the winner set to prevail in this epochal competition between these two fiercely opposed national systems. In this soon-to-be triumphant system…

Despite a rhetorical commitment to egalitarianism and "democracy," the elite class deeply distrusts and fears the people over whom it rules. These elites have concentrated themselves into a separate oligarchic political body focused on prioritizing and preserving their rule and their own overlapping set of shared interests. Wracked by anxiety, they strive constantly to maximize their control over the masses, rationalizing a need to forcefully maintain stability in the face of dangerous threats, foreign and domestic. Everything is treated as an emergency. "Safety" and "security" have become be the watchwords of the state, and of society generally.

This elite obsession with control is accelerated by a belief in "scientific management," or the ability to understand, organize, and run all the complex systems of society like a machine, through scientific principles and technologies. The expert knowledge of how to do so is considered the unique and proprietary possession of the elite vanguard. Ideologically, this elite is deeply materialist, and openly hostile to organized religion, which inhibits and resists state control. They view human beings themselves as machines to be programmed, and, believing the common man to be an unpredictable creature too stupid, irrational, and violent to rule himself, they endeavor to steadily condition and replace him with a better model through engineering, whether social or biological. Complex systems of surveillance, propaganda, and coercion are implemented to help firmly nudge (or shove) the common man into line. Communities and cultural traditions that resist this project are dismantled. Harmfully contrary ideas are systematically censored, lest they lead to dangerous exposure. Governing power has been steadily elevated, centralized, and distributed to a technocratic bureaucracy unconstrained by any accountability to the public.

All of this is justified by a utopian ideological dialectic of historical progress and inevitability. Those more in tune with the tide of history (i.e. elite interests) are held to be morally and intellectually superior, as a class, to backwards reactionary elements. Only certain views are stamped "scientific" and "correct," although these may change on a political whim. An economism that values only the easily quantifiable reigns as the only moral lodestar, and frictionless efficiency is held up as highest common good; the individual is encouraged to fulfill his assigned role as a docile consumer and cog in the regime's machine, not that of a self-governing citizen. The state regularly acts to stimulate and manage consumer demand, and to strategically regulate and guide industrial production, and the corporate sector has largely fused itself with the state. Cronyism is rampant.

The relentless political messaging and ideological narrative has come to suffuse every sphere of life, and dissent is policed. Culture is largely stagnant. Uprooted, corralled, and hounded, the people are atomized, and social trust is very low. Reality itself often feels obscured and uncertain. Demoralized, some gratefully accept any security offered by the state as a blessing. At the same time, many citizens automatically assume everything the regime says is a lie. Officialdom in general is a Kafkaesque tragi-comedy of the absurd, something only to be stoically endured by normal people. Yet year by year the pressure to conform only continues to be ratcheted higher…

Which country does this describe? If you can't quite tell, well, that's the point. For many citizens of the West, the systems of governance under which we live increasingly feel uncomfortably similar to what appears offer in the People's Republic of China.

There are limits to this similarity, of course: the Chinese Communist Party is a brutal regime that has in the past killed tens of millions of its own people and still rules over them with an iron fist. To say that the United States or any other Western country is identical in nature to China would be ridiculous.

And yet, I'm going to argue that commonalities are indeed growing, and that this is no illusion, coincidence, or conspiracy, but the product of the same deep systemic forces and underlying ideological roots. To claim that we're the same as China, or even just that we're turning into China (as I've admittedly implied with the title) would really just be political clickbait. The reality is more complicated, but no less unsettling: *both* China and the West, in their own ways and at their own pace, but for the same reasons, are converging from different directions on the same point – the same not-yet-fully-realized system of totalizing techno-administrative governance. Though they remain different, theirs is no longer a difference of

kind, only of degree. China is just already a bit further down the path towards the same future.

But how should we describe this form of government that has already begun to wrap its tentacles around the world today, including here in the United States? Many of us recognize by now that whatever it is we now live under, it sure isn't "liberal democracy." So what is it? To begin answering that, and to really explain the China Convergence, we're going to need to start with a crash course on the rise and nature of the technocratic managerial regime in the West.

Part I: The Managerial Regime

"To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle." – *George Orwell*

Sometime around the second half of the 19th century a revolution in human affairs began to take place, occurring in parallel to and building on the industrial revolution. This was a revolution of *mass* and *scale*, which upended nearly every area of human activity and rapidly reorganized civilization, first in the West and then around the world: the limits of time and space produced by geography were swept away by new technologies of communication and transportation; greatly enlarged populations flowed into and swelled vast urban centers; masses of workers began to toil in huge factories, and then in offices, laboring through an endless paper trail trying to keep track of it all; in politics new opportunities arose for those who could seize on the growing power of the masses and their votes, along with new challenges in providing for their growing needs and desires. In government, in business, in education, and in almost every other sphere of life, new methods and *techniques of organization* emerged in order to manage the growing complexities of mass and scale: the mass bureaucratic state, the mass standing army, the mass corporation, mass media, mass public education, and so on. This was the *managerial revolution.*[1]

Rapidly accelerating in the 20th century, the managerial revolution soon began to instigate another transformation of society in the West: it gave birth to a new *managerial elite*. A new social class had arisen out of the growing scale and complexity of mass organizations as those

organizations began to find that, in order to function, they had to rely on large numbers of people who possessed the necessary highly technical and specialized cognitive skills and knowledge, including new techniques of organizational planning and management at scale. Such people became the *professional managerial class*, which quickly expanded to meet the growing demand for their services. While the wealthy families of the old landed aristocratic elite at first continued to *own* many of these new mass organizations, they soon were no longer capable of *operating* them, as the traits that had long defined mastery of their role and status – land ownership, inherited warrior virtues, a classical liberal education, formal rhetoric, personal charisma, an extensive code of social manners, etc. – were no longer sufficient or relevant for doing so. This meant the managerial class soon captured *de facto* control of all the mass organizations of society.

This managerial takeover was accelerated by what I call the *managerial doom loop*: the larger and more complex an organization grows, the exponentially more managers are needed; managers therefore have a strong incentive to ensure their organization continues to grow larger and more complex, resulting in greater relative power for the managers; more growth means more managers must be hired, who then push for more expansion, including by rationalizing a need for their cancerous bureaucracy to take over ever more functions of the broader economy and society; as more and more territory is surrendered to bureaucratic management, more managers must be educated, which requires more managers…

Anyway, a reckoning over which class now really constituted society's ruling elite soon became inevitable. In some places the old aristocracy's end was swift, and bloody. But in most of the West they were not eradicated but coopted and absorbed, with the children of even the wealthiest aristocratic families eventually forced to themselves acquire an education in the same skills, ideas, and mannerisms as the managerial class in order to take on any prominent role, from CEO to politician, to philanthropist. Those who did not do so slowly faded into irrelevance. The managerial class had produced the managerial elite.

This did not mean, however, that the expansion of the new managerial order faced no resistance at all from the old order that it strangled. That previous order, which has been referred to by scholars of the managerial revolution as the *bourgeois order*, was represented not so much by the *grande bourgeoisie* (wealthy landed aristocrats and early capitalist industrialists) but by the *petite bourgeoisie*, or what could be described as the independent middle class.[2] The entrepreneurial small business owner, the multi-generational family shop owners, the small-scale farmer or landlord; the community religious or private educator; even the relatively well-to-do local doctor: these and others like them formed the backbone of a

large social and economic class that found itself existentially at odds with the interests of the managerial revolution. But, in contrast to what was originally predicted by Marxists, these bourgeoisie came to be mortally threatened not from below by the laboring, landless proletariat, but from above, by the new order of the managerial elite and their expanding legions of paper-pushing professional revolutionaries. The clash between these classes, as the managerial order steadily encroached on, dismantled, and subsumed more and more of the middle class bourgeois order and its traditional culture, and the increasingly desperate backlash this process generated from its remnants, would come to define much of the political drama of the West. That drama continues in various forms to this day.

The animosity of this class struggle was accentuated by the particularly antagonistic ideology that coalesced as a unifying force for the managerial elite. While this *managerial ideology*, in its various flavors, presents itself in the lofty language of moral values, philosophical principles, and social goods, it just so happens to rationalize and justify the continual expansion of managerial control into all areas of state, economy, and culture, while elevating the managerial class to a position of not only utilitarian but moral superiority over the rest of society – and in particular over the middle and working classes. This helps serve as a rationale for the managerial elite's legitimacy to rule, as well as an invaluable means to differentiate, unify, and coordinate the various branches of that elite.

Managerial ideology, a relatively straightforward descendant of the Enlightenment [liberal-modernist project](), is a formula that consists of several core beliefs, or what could be called core *managerial values*. At least in the West, these can be distilled into:

1. *Technocratic Scientism*: The belief that everything, including society and human nature, can and should be fully understood and controlled through scientific and technical means. In this view everything consists of systems, which operate, as in a machine, on the basis of scientific laws that can be rationally derived through reason. Humans and their behavior are the product of the systems in which they are embedded. "Social science" functions in the same way as the physical sciences. These systems can therefore be socially engineered to be improved. Good and bad, like everything else, are scientifically quantifiable. Those with superior scientific and technical knowledge are thus those best placed to understand the cause and effect governing society, and therefore to run it. Ignorance, and the ignorant, are in contrast ultimately the cause of all dysfunction and harm.

2. *Utopianism*: The belief that a perfect society is possible – in this case through the perfect application of perfect scientific and technical knowledge. The machine can ultimately be

tuned to run flawlessly. At that point all will be completely provided for and therefore completely equal, and man himself will be entirely rational, fully free, and perfectly productive. This state of perfection is the *telos*, or pre-destined end point, of human development (through science, physical and social). This creates the idea of *progress*, or of moving closer to this final end. Consequently history has a teleology: it bends towards utopia. This also means the future is necessarily always better than the past, as it is closer to utopia. History now takes on moral valence; to "go backwards" is immoral. Indeed even actively conserving the status quo is immoral; governance is only moral in so far as it [affects change](), thus moving us ever forwards, towards utopia.

3. *Meliorism*: The belief that all the flaws and conflicts of human society, and of human beings themselves, are problems that can and should be directly ameliorated by sufficient managerial technique. Poverty, war, disease, criminality, ignorance, suffering, unhappiness, death… none are examples of the human condition that will always be with us, but are all problems to be solved. It is the role of the managerial elite to identify and solve such problems by applying their expert knowledge to improve human institutions and relationships, as well as the natural world. In the end there are no tradeoffs, only solutions.

4. *Liberationism*: The belief that individuals and society are held back from progress by the rules, restraints, relational bonds, historical communities, inherited traditions, and limiting institutions of the past, all of which are the chains of false authority from which we must be liberated so as to move forwards. Old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits must all be dismantled in order to ameliorate human problems, as old systems and ways of life are necessarily ignorant, flawed, and oppressive. Newer – and therefore superior – scientific knowledge can re-design, from the ground up, new systems and ways of life that will function more efficiently and morally.

5. *Hedonistic Materialism*: The belief that complete human happiness and well-being fundamentally consists of and is achievable through the fulfillment of a sufficient number of material needs and psychological desires. The presence of any unfulfilled desire or discomfort indicates the systemic inefficiency of an un-provided good that can and should be met in order to move the human being closer to a perfected state. Scientific management can and should therefore to the greatest extent possible maximize the fulfillment of desires. For the individual, consumption that alleviates desire is a moral act. In contrast, repression (including self-repression) of desires and their fulfillment stands in the way of human progress, and is immoral, signaling a need for managerial liberation.

6. *Homogenizing Cosmopolitan Universalism*: The belief that: a) all human beings are fundamentally interchangeable and members of a single universal community; b) that the systemic "best practices" discovered by scientific management are universally applicable in all places and for all people in all times, and that therefore the same optimal system should rationally prevail everywhere; c) that, while perhaps quaint and entertaining, any non-superficial particularity or diversity of place, culture, custom, nation, or government structure anywhere is evidence of an inefficient failure to successfully converge on the ideal system; and d) that any form of localism, particularism, or federalism is therefore not only inefficient and backwards but an obstacle to human progress and so is dangerous and immoral. Progress will always naturally entail centralization and homogenization.

7. *Abstraction and Dematerialization*: The belief, or more often the instinct, that [abstract and virtual things are better than physical things](), because the less tied to the messy physical world humans and their activities are, the more liberated and capable of pure intellectual rationality and uninhibited morality they will become. Practically, dematerialization, such as through digitalization or financialization, is a potent solvent that can help burn away the repressive barriers created by attachments to the particularities of place and people, replacing them with the fluidity and universality of the cosmopolitan. Dematerialization makes property more easily tradable, and can more effectively produce homogenization and fulfill desires at scale. Indeed in theory dematerialization could allow almost everything to take on and be managed at vastly greater, even infinite, mass and scale, holding out the hope of total efficiency: a state of pure frictionlessness, in which [change (progress) will be effortless and limitless](). Finally, dematerialization also most broadly represents an ideological belief that it is the world that should conform to abstract theory, not theory that must conform to the world.

Combined, the promotion of these seven managerial values served as a convenient ideological means for the managerial system to challenge the existing ethic and values of the middle-class bourgeois order that preceded it. These *bourgeois values* consisted of a mix of conservative and classical liberal values. Nowhere were these values once more distinct than in America, where they had developed into a recognizable blend that included: a strong preference for local governance, grass-roots democracy, and an aversion to top-down control; an accepted diversity of regional and local folkways and traditions; a general mythic ideal of spirited individualism and energetic self-reliance; a countervailing tradition of tight-knit family life and [exceptionally widespread participation]() in a proliferation of thick religious, community, and civic associations and affiliations (as most famously described by Alexis de

Tocqueville); "Protestant work ethic," and an attention to thrift and self-discipline as moral virtues; an intimate connection to the land, and a very strong attachment to middle-class property ownership as central to republican self-governance and the national character; political realism and a conservative aversion to too rapid and radical of change.

The contrasting values of managerial ideology were perfectly structured to invert, undermine, marginalize, disrupt, and dismantle every one of these bourgeois values simultaneously, steadily subverting the ideological basis for bourgeois legitimacy intellectually, morally, and politically, thus clearing the way to justify the establishment of an alternative political system of rule by the new managerial elite.

The Managerial System

This managerial system developed into several overlapping, interlinked sectors that can be roughly divided into and categorized as: the *managerial state*, the *managerial economy*, the *managerial intelligentsia*, the *managerial mass media*, and *managerial philanthropy*. Each of these five sectors features its own slightly unique species of managerial elite, each with its own roles and interests. But each commonly acts out of its own interest to reinforce and protect the interests of the other sectors, and the system as a whole. All of the sectors are bound together by a shared interest in the expansion of technical and mass organizations, the proliferation of managers, and the marginalization of non-managerial elements.

The managerial state, characterized by its proliferating administrative bureaucracies and thirst for centralized technocratic control, has a strong incentive to launch utopian and meliorist schemes to "liberate" and reorganize more and more portions of society (the theoretical bases for which are pumped out by the managerial intelligentsia), necessitating entire new layers of bureaucratic management (and whole new categories of "experts"). Mass corporations, which make up the managerial economy, have an interest in seeing these schemes implemented, in part because the new layers of regulatory burden that they inevitably produce (more lawyers, more HR managers, etc.) systematically advantage large oligopolistic firms like themselves over those smaller businesses and entrepreneurial upstarts that are both their potential competitors and the old bourgeois power base. The managerial state naturally also wants to break that rival power base. Mass corporations are especially adept at doing this, in particular by advancing the dematerialization of business and property ownership ("you'll own nothing and be happy"), which both increases the dependence of the middle class and concentrates greater wealth and power in managerial hands. The managerial state also acts to directly stimulate aggregate consumer demand and bolster financialized

assets through monetary and fiscal policy, among other tools, such as state contracts and subsidies; this managed demand directly fuels the growth of managerial corporations, which have every incentive to fuse themselves as closely as possible with the state, both to encourage stimulus and to capture regulatory policy. The growth of mass corporations in turn rationalizes the further growth of the regulatory state. Formal and informal "public-private partnership" between corporation and state easily serves the interests of both.

Meanwhile the managerial corporation also has a great deal to gain from the project of mass homogenization, which allows for greater scale and efficiencies (a Walmart in every town, a Starbucks on every corner, Netflix and Amazon accessible on the iPhone in every pocket) by breaking down the differentiations of the old order. The state, which fears and despises above all else the local control justified by differentiation, is happy to assist. The managerial economy also gains directly from the stimulation of greater consumer demand produced by the liberation of the masses from the repressive norms of the old bourgeois moral code and the encouragement of hedonistic alternatives – as thought up by the intelligentsia, advertised by the mass media, and legally facilitated by the state. Mass media, too, has an interest in homogenization, allowing the entertainments and narratives it sells to scale and reach a larger and more uniform audience. Mass media, already an outgrowth of journalism's integration with the mass corporation, also has [an incentive to integrate itself](#) with both the intelligentsia and the state in order to gain privileged access to information; the intelligentsia meanwhile relies of the media to affirm their prestige, while naturally the state has an incentive to fuse with the media to effectively distribute the chosen information and narratives it wants to reach the masses.

As the old bottom-up network of extended families, social associations, religious congregations, neighborhood charities, and other institutions of grass-roots bourgeois community life are broken down by the managerial system, managerial philanthropy – funded by the wealth produced by the managerial economy and offering the elite a means to transform that wealth into social power tax free – is eager to fill the void with a crude simulacrum, offering top-down philanthropic initiatives, managerial non-profit grifts, and astroturfed activist movements in their place. These inevitably work to spread managerial ideology and the utopian social engineering campaigns of the state, further disrupting the bourgeois order. The breakdown of that order then inevitably only produces more social problems, which in turn provide new opportunities for managerial philanthropy to offer "solutions." The managerial state, mass media, and mass corporations are eager to participate

in these assaults, while the intelligentsia provides both the ideas and ready-made managerial do-gooders to man the frontlines.

Finally, the managerial intelligentsia functions as the vanguard of the whole managerial system, providing the unifying ideological framework that serves as the system's intellectual foundation, rationale, and source of moral legitimacy.[3] The ideological pronouncements of the intelligentsia, transmitted to the public as revealed truth (e.g. "the Science") by the managerial mass media, serve to normalize and justify the schemes of the state, which in turn gratefully supports the intelligentsia with public money and programs of mass public education, which funnel demand into the intelligentsia's institutions and also help to fund the research and development of new technologies and organizational techniques that can further expand managerial control. The intelligentsia of course also provides a critical service to every other managerial sector by meeting the need for the formation of more professional managerial class members through mass education – which also helps to advance societal homogenization and further elite cultural hegemony. The managerial intelligentsia therefore functions as the keystone of the managerial elite's broad-based and resilient *unity and dominance* (which is what defines them as *the* elite).

This hegemonic, self-reinforcing system of overlapping managerial elite interests – public and private, economic, cultural, social, and governmental – can together be described as the *managerial regime*. To identify or describe this regime as simply "the state" would be entirely insufficient. As we will see, the evolution of this broader regime is today the central factor of the China Convergence.

But first there is one important historical differentiation in how managerial regimes have emerged and evolved that we must address.

Managerialism: Hard vs. Soft

What's described above is the managerial regime as it emerged in the United States and a number of other Western nations in the 20th century. It is not, however, the only species of managerial regime to have evolved during this time.

When the Communist Party took control of China, the bourgeoisie and the old aristocracy were not gently coopted into joining the managerial elite. Instead, as with the *Kulaks* (middle-class peasants) of Lenin and Stalin's USSR, they were virtually exterminated. An endless series of bloody "campaigns" launched in the name of liberation by Mao Zedong against "landlords," "rich peasants," "rightists," "counter-revolutionaries," and "bourgeois elements"

all had the same objective. Through relentless collective persecution, confiscation of property, and mass torture, rape, and murder, the bourgeois middle class that had begun to emerge during China's Republican period was systematically destroyed.

This served a straightforward purpose. Political theorists since Aristotle have recognized that "a numerous middle class which stands between the rich and the poor" is the natural bedrock of any stable republican system of government, resisting both domination by a plutocratic oligarchy and tyrannical revolutionary demands by the poorest. By eliminating this class, which had been the powerbase of his Nationalist rivals, Mao paved the way for his intelligentsia-led Marxist-Leninist revolution to dismantle every remaining vestige of republican government, replace the old elite with a new one, and take total control of Chinese society.

The result was not of course an egalitarian workers' paradise but the development of a strictly two-tier society of Party oligarchy and everyone else. Every possible orienting and organizing force outside the Party was destroyed, family networks were deliberately disrupted, and individuals were isolated and atomized. Meanwhile the oligarchy would soon grow into a gigantic bureaucratic party-state, managed by legions of devoted CCP apparatchiks. With no mediating institutions between people and state remaining, and with the undifferentiated masses thus fully contained by the uncontested power of a one-party state, Mao succeeded in essentially producing Hobbes' Leviathan in China. He and his comrades were then free to enact their utopian schemes to remake the country along "scientific" socialist lines (killing tens of millions of Chinese in the process). And while today's China is quite a bit mellower than during the Mao era, its regime is not fundamentally any different in its core nature. It is still run by a Marxist-Leninist party that has never forgotten Mao's conviction that power grows out of the barrel of a gun.

The brutal history and character of the Chinese communist regime is therefore very different from what most of the West has experienced (outside of Eastern and Central Europe). And yet – if you've been following along so far – China, with its vast techno-bureaucratic socialist state, is still recognizably a managerial regime. More precisely, China is a *hard managerial regime.*

Ever since the political philosopher James Burnham published his seminal book *The Managerial Revolution* in 1941, theorists of the managerial regime have noted strong underlying similarities between all of the major modern state systems that emerged in the 20th century, including the system of liberal-progressive administration as represented at the

time by FDR's America, the fascist system pioneered by Mussolini, and the communist system that first appeared in Russia and then spread to China and elsewhere. The thrust of all of these systems was fundamentally managerial in character. And yet each also immediately displayed some, uh, quite different behavior. This difference can, however, be largely explained if we distinguish between what the political theorist Sam Francis classified as *soft* and *hard* managerial regimes.

The character of the *soft managerial regime* is that described in the previous section. In contrast, a hard managerial regime differs somewhat in its mix of values. Hard managerial regimes tend to reject two of the seven values of the (soft) managerial ideology described above, discarding hedonism and cosmopolitanism (though homogenization and centralization remain a priority). Instead they tend to emphasize managing the unity of the collective (e.g. the *volk*, or "the people") and the value that individual loyalty, strength, and self-sacrifice provides to that collective.[4]

Most importantly, hard and soft managerial regimes differ in their approach to control. Hard managerial regimes default to the use of force, and are adept at using the threat of force to coerce stability and obedience. The state also tends to play a much more open role in the direction of the economy and society in hard systems, establishing state-owned corporations and taking direct control of mass media, for example, in addition to maintaining large security services. This can, however, reduce popular trust in the state and its organs.

In contrast, soft managerial regimes are largely inept and uncomfortable with the open use of force, and much prefer to instead maintain control through narrative management, manipulation, and hegemonic control of culture and ideas. The managerial state also downplays its power by outsourcing certain roles to other sectors of the managerial regime, which claim to be independent. Indeed they *are* independent, in the sense that they are not directly controlled by the state and can do what they want – but, being managerial institutions, staffed by managerial elites, and therefore stakeholders in the managerial imperative, they nonetheless operate in almost complete sync with the state. Such diffusion helps effectively conceal the scale, unity, and power of the soft managerial regime, as well as deflect and defuse any accountability. This softer approach to maintaining managerial regime dominance may lead to more day-to-day disorder (e.g. crime), but is no less politically stable than the hard variety (and arguably has to date proved more stable).

Despite these differences, every form of managerial regime shares the same fundamental characteristics and core values, including a devotion to technocratic scientism, utopianism,

meliorism, homogenization, and one form or another of liberationism aimed at uprooting previous systems, norms, and values. They all pursue the same imperative of expanding mass organizations and the managerial elite, of growing and centralizing their bureaucratic power and control, and of systematically marginalizing managerialism's enemies. They all have the same philosophical roots. And all their elites share similar deep anxieties about the public.

Part II: Making the Demos Safe for Democracy

After the uprising of the 17th June
The Secretary of the Writers Union
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee
Stating that the people
Had forfeited the confidence of the government
And could win it back only
By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier
In that case for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?
– Bertolt Brecht, "The Solution" (1953)

"In the great debate of the past two decades about freedom versus control of the network, China was largely right and the United States was largely wrong." So declared neoconservative lawyer and former Bush administration Assistant Attorney General Jack Goldsmith in a [high-profile 2020 essay](#) on democracy and the future of free speech for *The Atlantic* magazine. "Significant monitoring and speech control are inevitable components of a mature and flourishing internet, and governments must play a large role in these practices to ensure that the internet is compatible with a society's norms and values," he explained. "The private sector's collaboration with the government in these efforts, are a historic and very public experiment about how our constitutional culture will adjust to our digital future."

Back in the year 2000, President Bill Clinton had mocked the Chinese government's early attempts to censor free speech on the internet, suggesting that doing so would be "like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall." By the time Goldsmith's take was published in the flagship salon of the American ruling class two decades later, such scorn had been roundly replaced by open admiration. Beginning immediately after the 2016 election of Donald Trump, and then

accelerating exponentially in 2020, America's elite class began regularly arguing, as did *The New York Times* Emily Bazelon, that the country was "in the midst of an information crisis" producing "catastrophic" risks of harm, and that actually, "Free speech threatens democracy as much as it also provides for its flourishing." The American people would have to accept their free speech rights being curtailed for their own good.

As we now know thanks to revelations from the "Twitter Files" and other reporting, a sprawling "Censorship-Industrial Complex" was soon created to seize control of internet discourse and manage American minds. Billions of dollars of government money flowed into intelligence agencies, who discovered a new mission to wage information warfare on their own people in the name of combatting "disinformation." America's giant internet technology firms needed only a light cajoling to begin implementing, at the direction of the state, mass surveillance and censorship of information labeled as "harmful" (even that acknowledged to be "true content") because it ran counter to the propaganda line decided by the regime. Thousands of American intellectuals became "disinformation" experts overnight. In coordination with these academics and NGOs, mass media leapt to set up "fact checking" operations to arbitrarily declare what was and was not true, selling the public a tall-tale of foreign meddling and dark tides of online "hate" that conveniently justified having their burgeoning independent competition deplatformed from the internet.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was then seized upon as a reason to double-down on this attack on the public. As Jacob Siegel recently documented in a magisterial account of the origins of the "war on disinformation," the managerial state quickly re-oriented all the tools, techniques, and swollen bureaucratic automatons it had developed to fight the "Global War on Terror" in order to begin waging a counterinsurgency campaign against its own citizens.

Something had changed in the calculus of America's elites. Traditionally at least vaguely liberal, their seemingly abrupt U-turn on the value of free speech and deliberative democracy represents a paradigmatic example of a process enacting a final replacement of old order classical liberalism with an open embrace of total technocratic managerialism – one that we will explore in more detail soon. But what exactly prompted this sudden shift?

Revolt of the Public, Revolt of the Elite

The most immediate explanation for why the managerial elite decided to hurry up and cast off any tattered remains of the old American values is simply that they panicked. They panicked

because they experienced a moment in which they felt they nearly lost control. That moment was 2016, when the socialist Bernie Sanders had just nearly beat Hillary Clinton in the Democratic Party primary, the British people had decided they'd had enough of the EU, and then, most egregiously of all, the thoroughly déclassé Donald Trump won the US presidential election. None of this was supposed to happen; in each case the people were supposed to have voted the right way, the way the elite had planned on them voting, but they didn't. Worse, they seemed to be voting wrong as part of a broader trend of populations specifically reacting against and challenging managerial elite control.

Former CIA analyst Martin Gurri has coined the term "[revolt of the public](#)" to describe the ongoing phenomenon in which, around the world, the authority and legitimacy of elite institutions has collapsed as the digital revolution has undermined traditional elite gatekeepers' ability to fully control access to information and monopolize public narratives. This decline of hierarchical gatekeepers (such as legacy media) has helped to expose elite personal, institutional, and policy failures, as well as widespread corruption and the broader reality that the managerial system itself functions with little-to-no real public input or accountability. This has helped fuel public frustration and anger with the endemic and mounting problems of the status quo, mobilizing insurgent political movements to present democratic challenges to the establishment.

But, for the managerial elite, the character of this revolt is even more threatening than Gurri's summation implies. In the West, this underdog public rebellion is not only directed against the ruling managerial technocracy, but, critically, has been conducted by precisely the managerial elite's historic class enemies: the remnants of the old bourgeois middle class.

Who's Donating to Whom
The 100 occupations with the most workers who donated to each campaign

● More to Biden   ● More to Trump

↑ More workers donated to Biden

Trump to al of

More workers donated to Trump ↓
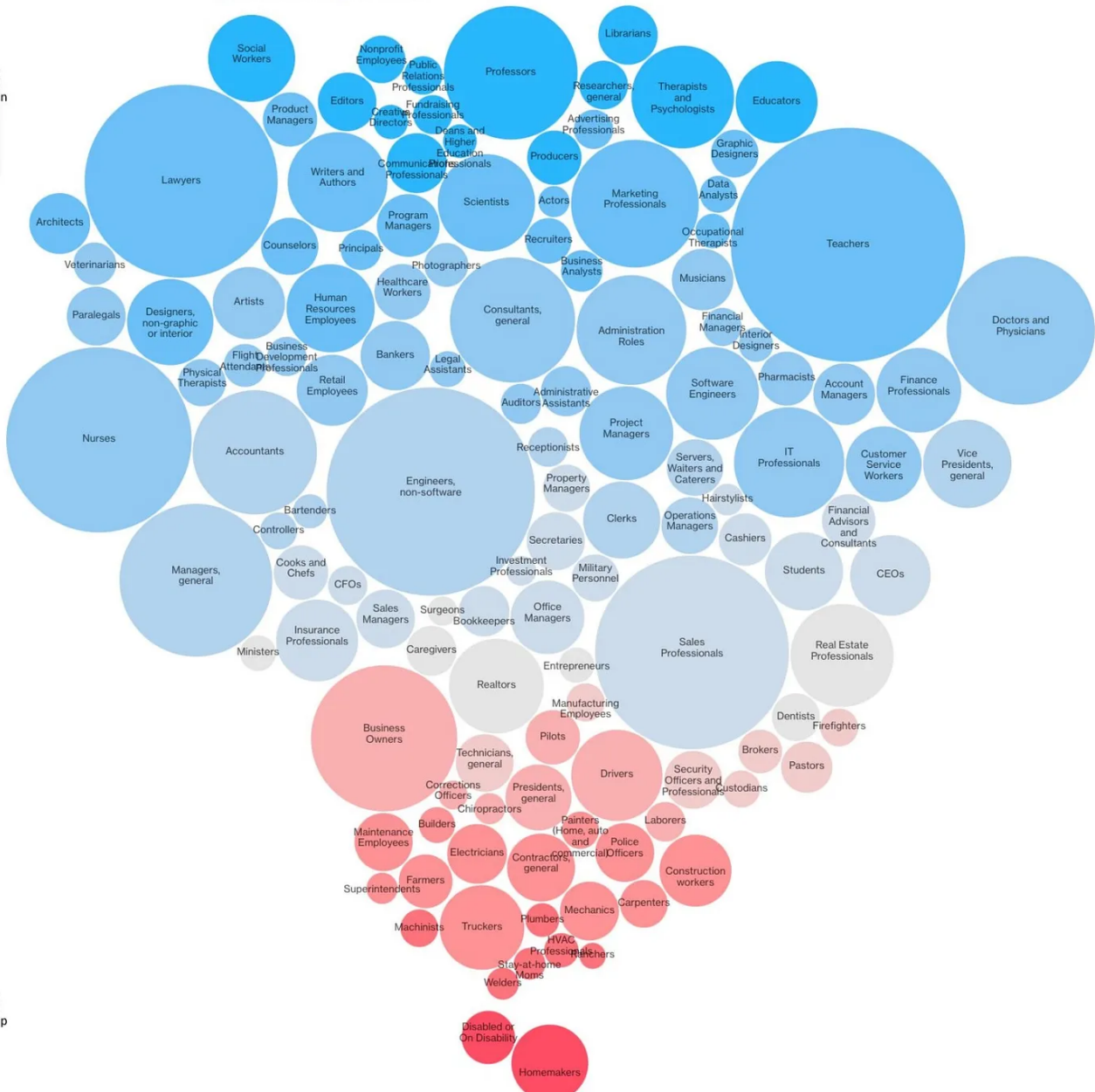
For the managerial elite this was the apparition of a terrifying nightmare. They thought they'd broken and cast down the old order forever. Now it seemed to be trying to climb out of the grave of history, where it belonged, to take its revenge and drag them all back to the dark ages before enlightened managerial rule had brought the word of progress to the world. The prospect of real power returning to the hands of their traditional enemies appeared to be a mortal threat to the future of the managerial class.

Across the West, the managerial elite therefore immediately went into a frenzy over the danger allegedly presented by "populism" and launched their own revolt, declaring a

[Schmittian state of exception](#) in which all the standard rules and norms of democratic politics could be suspended in order to respond to this existential "crisis." In fact, some began to question whether democracy itself might have to be suspended in order to save it.

"It's Time for the Elites to Rise Up Against the Ignorant Masses," *New York Time Magazine* journalist James Traub thundered with an iconic 2016 [piece](#) in *Foreign Policy* magazine. This quickly became a view openly and proudly embraced among the managerial elite, who no longer hesitated to express their frustration with democracy and its voters. ("Did I say 'ignorant'? Yes, I did. It is necessary to say that people are deluded and that the task of leadership is to un-delude them," Traub declared.) "Too Much Democracy is Killing Democracy," is how a 2019 [article](#) published by neocon rag *The Bulwark* put it, arguing for Western nations to take their "bitter technocratic medicine" and establish "a political, social, and cultural compact that makes participation by many unnecessary."

This elite revolt against democracy cannot be fully understood as a reaction only to proximate events, however – no matter how outrageously orange and crude their apparition. Rather, the populist revolts that emerged in 2016 sparked such an intense, openly anti-democratic reaction because they played directly into a much deeper complex of managerial anxieties, dreams, and obsessions that has roots stretching back more than a century.

Democracy and "Democracy"

It was 1887 and Woodrow Wilson thought America had a problem: too much democracy. What it needed instead was the "science of administration." "The democratic state has yet to be equipped for carrying those enormous burdens of administration which the needs of this industrial and trading age are so fast accumulating," the then-young professor of political science wrote in what would become his most influential academic work, "The Study of Administration."

Deeply influenced by Social Darwinism and eugenics,[5] vocal in his contempt for the idea of being "bound to the doctrines held by the signers of the Declaration of Independence" ("a lot of nonsense… about the inalienable rights of the individual"), and especially impatient with the Constitution's insistence on the idea of "checks and balances," Wilson believed the American state needed to evolve or die. For too long it had been "saddled with the habits" of constitutionalism and deliberative politics; now the complexity of the world was growing too great for such antiquated principles, which were "no longer of more immediate practical moment than questions of administration."

Asserting the urgent need for "comparative studies in government," he urged America's leadership class to look around the world and see that, "Administration is everywhere putting its hands to new undertakings," and, "The idea of the state and the consequent ideal of its duty are undergoing noteworthy change." America had to change too. "Seeing every day new things which the state ought to do, the next thing is to see clearly how it ought to do them," he wrote. Simple as.

But what did Wilson mean by "administration" anyway? "Administration lies outside the proper sphere of *politics*," he wrote. "Administrative questions are not political questions." By this he meant that all the affairs of the modern state, all the "new things the state ought to do," should be placed above any vulgar interference from the political – that is, above any democratic debate, choice, or accountability – and instead turned over to an elevated class of educated men whose full-time "profession" would be governing the rabble. What Wilson explicitly proposed was rule by the "universal class" described by Hegel: an all-knowing, all-beneficent class of expert "civil servants," who, using their big brains and operating on universal principles derived from Reason, could uniquely determine and act in the universal interest of society with far more accuracy than the ignorant, unrefined masses.

In Wilson's view the opinion of the actual public was nothing but "a clumsy nuisance, a rustic handling delicate machinery." Overall, administration indeed meant running government as a machine, and the public could not be allowed to gum up the gears. Moreover, machines need engineers, which meant that, "It will be necessary to organize democracy by sending up to… the civil service men definitely prepared for standing liberal tests as to technical knowledge." Soon enough, "A technically schooled civil service will presently have become indispensable," he suggested, describing the entrenchment of rule by a managerial class.

In part, what Wilson was really advocating for was his personal German fetish. More specifically, he wanted America to import the political model that had most impressed him during his own "comparative studies in government": the Prussian administrative state of "Iron Chancellor" Otto van Bismarck. For Wilson, the Prussian system represented the best possible model for maximizing the march of progress. Parliamentary yet authoritarian, it combined the most enlightened economic and social advances of the time – the first welfare state, mass education programs, and a state-led *Kulturkampf* ("Culture War") against the Catholic Church and all the backwards forces of reaction – with political certainty, stability, and efficiency. Most importantly, it had developed a professional bureaucracy (i.e. an "administration") of managers handed the power and leeway to guide the country's

development along rational, "scientific" lines. Wilson would, two decades later, have the opportunity to begin imposing something like this model on America.

Campaigning in part on a promise to employ the power of government on behalf of what he advertised as the "New Freedom" of universal social justice, Wilson wormed his way into power in 1912 as the first and fortunately only political science professor ever elected President of the United States.[6] He fittingly rode to office on the back of the new American Progressive Movement, which had eagerly modeled itself on the then fashionable Progressive Party of Germany. An innovative political alliance, the new party had cunningly brought Germany's corporate power-players together with state bureaucrats and academic intelligentsia (together nicknamed the *Kathedersozialisten*, or "socialists of the endowed chair"), uniting them to push forward the kind of top-down social and economic reforms they all stood to benefit from. Wilson's hope for America to look to the German model for inspiration was thus fulfilled.

Over the course of his presidency (1913-1921), and seizing in particular on the opportunity provided by the crisis of WWI, Wilson would oversee the first great centralizing wave of America's managerial revolution, establishing much of the initial basis for the country's modern administrative bureaucracy, including imposing the first federal income tax and creating the Federal Reserve System, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Department of Labor.[7]

He also ruled as perhaps the most authoritarian executive in American history, criminalizing speech through his Espionage and Sedition acts, implementing mass censorship through the Post Office, setting up a dedicated propaganda ministry (The Committee on Public Information), and using his Attorney General to widely prosecute and jail his political opponents. More dissidents were arrested or jailed in two years of war under Wilson than in Italy under Mussolini during the entirety of the 1920s.

But Wilson's most important legacy was to begin the process to "organize democracy" in America just as he'd dreamed of doing as an academic: a "universal class" of managers would henceforth determine and govern on behalf of the people's true will; democracy would no longer to be messy, but made steadily more managed, predictable, and scientific. From this point forward the definition of democracy itself would begin to change: "democracy" no longer meant self-government by the *demos* – the people – exercised through voting and elections; instead it would come to mean the institutions, processes, and progressive objectives of the managerial civil service itself. In turn, actual democracy became "populism."

Protecting the sanctity of "democracy" now required protecting the managerial state from the *demos* by making governance less democratic.

Today this vision of "managed democracy" (also known as "guided democracy"), is a form of government much lusted after by elites around the world, having succeeded (in its more benevolent incarnations) in establishing orderly regimes in countries like Singapore and Germany, where the people still get to vote but real opposition to the steamroller of the state's agenda isn't tolerated. In such a system the people are offered the satisfaction of their views having been "listened" to by their political-administrative class, but said views can always be noted and dispensed with if they are a danger to "democracy" and its interests. Here Wilson's old question of how "to make public opinion efficient without suffering it to be meddlesome" seems to have found a solution.

The People's Republic of China has already taken this logic to its fullest conclusion. Popular voting may have been done away with all-together in China, but it too is still a democracy (it says so right in its constitution!). Instead of elections, the Party (which exists solely to represent the people, forever), rigorously assesses the will and interests of the masses through a process of internal consultation and deliberation it calls "people's whole-process democracy" – also known as "consultative democracy," for short.

Consultative democracy has serious advantages over the traditional kind in terms of maximizing managerial efficiency, which is why it has long been so admired by Western elites. "There is a level of admiration I actually have for China because their basic dictatorship is allowing them to actually turn their economy around on a dime and say we need to go green," Canada's Justin Trudeau has for instance [explained](#) (though typically stumbling over his words and forgetting to label China a democracy instead of a dictatorship). Or as *The New York Times'* elite-whisperer Thomas Friedman once [put it](#), if we could even just be "China for a day" then the state could, "you know, authorize the right solutions… on everything from the economy to environment." Overall, being more like China for at least a while would be super convenient because, as Friedman obligingly elaborated in his book *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*, "once the directions are given from above, we would be overcoming the worst part of our democracy (the inability to make big decisions in peacetime), and the very next day we would be able to enjoy the best part of our democracy (the power of our civic society to make government rules stick and the power of our markets to take advantage of them)."

The power of big-brain decision-makers to advance progress by forcing through big changes; "civic society" able to entrench and enforce state directives from above; markets able to symbiotically make a tidy profit on top-down change: as Friedman indicates, consultative democracy offers all the best parts of "democracy" without the hassle. No risk of the populist rubes ever getting to fondle any delicate machinery here! It should be no wonder that Western managerial elites have been smitten by this vision and the many advantages its offers (to themselves), and have thus everywhere rushed with growing fervor to adapt and implement it at home as fast and to the greatest extent that they can get away with. Wilson would be proud.

They also understand, however, that even this structural organizing will ultimately never be enough to protect "democracy" on its own. Having again and again run into the intractability of the people's obstinate nature, they long ago reached another implicit conclusion: the root challenge to "democracy" is not the structures of government, but the *demos* – the common man himself. *He* is a problem that requires a solution on an entirely deeper level. Making the *demos* safe for "democracy" would necessitate his replacement by a wholly new and safer man.

Mr. Science and the New Man

Psychologist, instrumentalist philosopher, and foremost American progressive educationalist John Dewey landed in China on May 1, 1919. It was three days before the outbreak of the May Fourth Movement, an anti-traditionalist wave that would grow out of student protests in Beijing and become a crusade to radically transform the nation. It would give birth to the Chinese Communist Party two years later, in 1921. The student movement's slogan called for China to embrace "Mr. Science" and "Mr. Democracy," and with Dewey's appearance it seemed Mr. Science had arrived. Chen Duxiu, co-founder of the CCP, said he thought Dewey embodied the whole spirit of the movement. Mao Zedong thought his educational theory "well worth studying."[8] Adored as a progressive and modernizing hero, Dewey would remain in China for a tour that lasted more than two years, delivering over two hundred lectures to crowds of thousands of adoring fans. Many of those lectures were then translated into best-selling books distributed across the country. He was lauded as a "second Confucius" and nicknamed Dewey Du Wei, or Dewey the Great.

Dewey the Great had already helped transform America. A leading light of the rising American progressive education movement, he had successfully led a mission to completely remake the American education system, remodeling the country's historic liberal arts colleges into copies of Germany's fashionable new centrally-managed "research universities," as well as generally overhauling the purpose and pedagogy of public education. Whereas Western

educational institutions had for centuries focused largely on cultural transmission and forming the character of the students in their charge through study of the humanities and the classical virtues, Dewey believed this approach was outdated and in fact immoral. Influenced by the [new philosophy of Logical Positivism](), he thought that instructing students in any belief in objective truth and authoritative notions of good and evil was harmful, as it was individual man himself who engaged in the "construction of the good." The education system therefore had to abandon its age-old mission and focus instead on teaching students the technical skills to thrive in modern industrial society – including, most critically, "how to think" in rational, scientific terms.

But of course Dewey and his likeminded colleagues *did* want to shape the character of America's children, just in a different way from the old order. For Dewey, who believed that democracy was not a form of government but an ethical project, fusing governance to the scientific method was the only possible path to achieving political and human progress. But doing that would require first changing democracy's voters.

Dewey believed public education was "the fundamental method of social progress and reform" precisely because it was, he wrote, "the only sure method of social reconstruction." Social reconstruction meant reengineering society. Frank Lester Ward, Dewey's teacher and mentor (and the first president of the American Sociological Association) was even less bashful: the purpose of formal education, he said, was now to be "a systemic process for the manufacture of correct opinions" in the public mind. (It should, he added, therefore be brought under the exclusive control of government, since "the result desired by the state is a wholly different one from that desired by parents, guardians, and pupils.")

Remaking society along scientific lines would necessitate reshaping men to fit their new machine. A reconstructed society would have to be built on the back of a reconstructed individual: a New Man, freed from the all the crude superstitions of his past and the messy irrationalities of his former nature. This anthropological project was the real purpose of Dewey and his Progressive Education movement: [they were Conditioners](). Elevated to peak influence by the presidency of Wilson (who expressed his own desire "to make the young gentlemen of the rising generation as unlike their fathers as possible"), Dewey and his colleagues had the opportunity to begin this quest by first revolutionizing the education system so that they could make future generations more pliable by systematically disembedding them from their past and their traditional loyalties and deconstructing the whole way in which they saw the world.

Mao, meanwhile, would embrace the same project with particular gusto. Progressive Americans of the early 20th century like Dewey and Wilson had developed a habit of referring to China and the Chinese people as marvelously "plastic," particularly suitable to be shaped at will by the hands of "strong and capable Westerners," as Wilson mused in 1914. The country could, they thought, serve as an ideal laboratory for social experimentation. Mao agreed. The Chinese people, he grew fond of saying, were "first of all, poor, and secondly blank" – i.e. the perfect canvas for his communist vision. This was not actually true, of course: the Chinese possessed millennia of rich history and traditional culture. So making the minds of the people as blank as desired took a fair amount of work on Mao's part.

This he set out to accomplish through a process he called "Thought Reform." First trialed in the isolated communist basecamp of Yan'an in 1942-43 and then forced on the whole of China in the 1950s following the CCP's takeover of the country, Thought Reform was a process of using indoctrination, public pressure, and terror to produce completely submissive and easily controlled individuals. Explicitly based on new theories of Pavlovian psychological conditioning imported from the USSR and much admired by Mao, it always followed the same distinct method: endless hours of "study" and "discussion" groups where silence was not an option; repeated "self-criticism" and writing of confessions, allegedly to "lay one's heart on the table" in the name of benevolent collective self-improvement and education; encouragement of neighbors and colleagues to report each other's alleged harmful faults, wrongdoings, and wrong ideas; separation of people into "good" and "bad" classes or groups; isolation of one target at a time and the "persuasion" of former friends and allies to join in a simultaneous attack; mass "struggle" meetings designed to overwhelm and humiliate the target, and to turn a purge into public spectacle and object lesson; forced groveling apologies, followed by "magnanimous" temporary mercy and redemption or rejection and destruction of the individual as a warning to others; cyclical repetition with persecution of new targets.

Whether a targeted individual was guilty or innocent of anything, or even loyal or disloyal, was entirely irrelevant. Nor was the purpose to convince or persuade anyone. That was not the point. As one witness recorded after seeing an enthusiastically loyal CCP cadre mercilessly persecuted: "Only later did I perceive that the Communists had been fully aware of [his] loyalty to their cause and were equally conscious that after the 'reform' he was disaffected. They had succeeded, however, in terrorizing him so thoroughly that henceforth, regardless of what he thought, he spoke and acted during every waking moment exactly as the Communists wanted. In this state, the Communists felt safer and more secure about him."[9]

This conditioning method was combined with an effort to create a fully controlled and wholly fluid information environment, where no one could be quite sure what was true or "correct" at any given moment. Journalism and literature were strictly censored; satire was outlawed. Scholars and educators had to repeatedly revise works to conform to the latest orthodoxy; some rewrote their own articles and books dozens of times over, or renounced them entirely. Books in general were generally sources of information too stable to be permitted, and were destroyed – along with vast repositories of China's historical records and knowledge – on an almost inconceivable scale. In Shanghai, for instance, 237 tons of books were destroyed in two months of 1951 alone. In Shantou in May 1953 a giant bonfire lasting three days was needed to incinerate some 300,000 volumes representing "vestiges of the feudal past." The party's sloganeering propaganda organs became the only permissible source of information, and everyone soon found that, for their own safety, they had no choice but to follow them closely in order to try to stay abreast of the constantly shifting "party line."

This process of total ideological indoctrination and control – also colloquially known as *xinao* (洗脑, literally: to "wash brains") – would be made most famous during China's later Cultural Revolution, but was in fact the whole foundation of Maoism from the start. This was because it worked. Foreign journalists permitted to visit Yan'an in 1944 noted that an "air of nervous intensity" was constant and "stifling," and that while "most people had very earnest faces and serious expressions" no one but top leaders like Mao ever cracked a joke. "If you ask the same question to twenty or thirty people, from intellectuals to workers, their replies are always more or less the same," one marveled. "Even questions about love, there seems to be a point of view that has been decided by meetings."[10] In time the whole country would be reduced to the same state of stifling conformity.

Thought Reform was perhaps the most comprehensive and dramatic ideological indoctrination process ever attempted. It was also unbelievably violent and destabilizing, with millions killed over just the course of Mao's early reform and "rectification" campaigns. The reality of it would therefore doubtless have horrified Dewey and his refined progressive intellectual's sensibilities. But its fundamental purpose was exactly the same as his own: to so completely break down the people's old ways of living and thinking that human nature could be abolished and a New Man and a New Society constructed on top of the ruins.[11] This totalizing utopian vision, so utterly integral to communism, is simply the ultimate expression of *all* managerialism's relentless ideological compulsion to "rationally" redesign and control the whole world and everything in it as one would a machine.

Still, it's true that Mao's brute force method was particularly crude. In the soft managerialism of the West the effort to build a politically safer, more right-thinking New Man would adopt far more subtle, sophisticated, and gentle methods for washing brains.

The Therapeutic State and the Threat Within

Germany and Japan surrendered in 1945, but World War II didn't end. Managerial liberalism had engaged in its first global ideological war, and once the shooting had stopped the ideological struggle was just getting started. Europe and even the American homeland itself still had yet to be truly liberated. The problem was: fascism continued to lurk in minds everywhere. Eradicating it would require nothing less than the psychological transformation of entire populations.

That at least was the conclusion of the politico-psychoanalytic movement led by German self-described Freudo-Marxist Wilhelm Reich, who became convinced that working class Germans were susceptible to authoritarianism because of their unhealthily "repressed" sexuality and attachment to traditional gender roles. Only by liberating them from sexual restraint (Reich coined the phrase "sexual revolution") and especially by destroying forever the rigid structure of the family and the authority of its patriarchal father figure – i.e. the *Fuhrer* – could they be reformed and their psyches made safe for liberal democracy.

As [Matthew Crawford](#) has skillfully [explained](#), by identifying the structure of society as not merely politically or economically unjust but psychologically "sick," Reich and his Freudo-Marxist colleagues had come up with "a political program that would require nothing less than a moral revolution, working at the deepest level of the individual." True and lasting Marxist revolution would be accomplished not by the striking prole, but by the professional psychotherapist.[12]

During the war, Reich's ideas gained significant traction among the educated liberal managerial elite that populated the upper ranks of the American security services, especially within the OSS (the precursor to the CIA). His Freudian political-therapeutic project was soon taken up by the US-led Allied High Commission as a core part of the all-powerful military government's expansive "denazification" of occupied Germany. The psychology and sociology departments of German universities were staffed with returning emigre scholars, often selected from among the Freudo-Marxists and the intellectually adjacent critical

theorists of the Frankfurt School, and transformed into vehicles for promoting the mass reeducation of Germans. The goal was nothing less than "the mental transformation of the German human being," as plans drawn up by Frankfurt School leader Max Horkheimer proposed.

This project was then immediately re-imported to America as well. Before the war was even over, the US government began to fund and facilitate a new wave of psychological research, guided by refugee European psychoanalysts. The War Department, for instance, conducted studies on discharged soldiers, outsourcing this research to psychanalysts who blamed psychological breakdowns in combat not on acute stress but on the repressions of their conservative childhood family life. By far the most influential work, however, would be conducted by the Frankfurt School's Theodore Adorno, who produced a new model for psychological assessment called the "F-Scale" (the F stands for Fascist).

The F-Scale, which Adorno pulled straight out of his ass, was a questionnaire that evaluated subjects' agreement with standard conservative or right-wing beliefs and traits (such as religiousness, belief in inherent gender differences, or overall "conventionalism," i.e. "conformity to the traditional societal norms and values of the middle class") and chalked these up as evidence of latent fascist sympathies. Since Adorno and his disciples were Marxists, the survey originally ranked subjects on an authoritarian vs. revolutionary axis (opposition to revolution being "authoritarianism"), but in order to better play to their American sponsors this was re-labeled to read as an authoritarian vs. "democratic" axis. This "research" would later form the basis for *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), a volume that became one of the most influential works of psychology ever produced, structuring the whole direction of decades' worth of psychological research in the United States and going on to inform the beliefs of the left-wing counter-culture movements of the 1960s (and beyond). Most importantly, it accomplished a spectacular feat of political-linguistic jujitsu: successfully redefining public understanding of fascism – in reality the very essence of a hard technocratic managerial regime, obsessed with leveraging state-corporate fusion to promote collective strength, homogenous efficiency, and scientific progress from the top down – as synonymous with conservative democratic populism.

With this new definition in hand, evidence of fascist sympathies could then [be discovered](#) [all over](#) the United States. As Martin Bergmann, a US Army psychoanalyst from 1943 to 1945, recounted in a 2002 BBC documentary *The Century of the Self*, government psychologists' assessment tours of middle America, conducted to find out "what goes on in all those little towns" between the civilized coasts, revealed "a much more problematic country" than they'd

ever imagined, filled as it apparently was with normie middle-class families raising budding little Fuhrer-lovers.

The US government leapt into action to ask the experts how to control this dangerous enemy within. The answer, as Bergmann tells it, was that, "What is needed is a human being that can internalize democratic values." A New Liberal-Democratic Man. "Psychoanalysis carried in it the promise that it can be done," he recounts. "It opened up new vistas as to how the inner structure of the human being can be changed so that he becomes a more vital, free supporter and maintainer of democracy."

The US government thus "took up anti-fascism as a wider mandate of moral and social transformation," as Crawford puts it. Suddenly, "The inner lives of Americans were now something that needed to be managed. Anti-fascism in the United States would be a science of social adjustment working at a deep level of the psyche, modeled on the occupation government's parallel effort in Germany."

In 1946, President Truman declared a mental health crisis in the United States and the Congress passed the National Mental Health Act, empowering an arm of the administrative state – the National Institutes of Health – with a mission to manage Americans' psychological state. Hundreds of new psychoanalysts were trained and dispersed to set up "psychological guidance centers" in towns across America. Therapists, counselors, and social workers began to nose their way into every aspect of family, school, and working life.

The *therapeutic state* had been born. From now on managing the mental and emotional lives of Americans would be a duty of the state and its "civil society," not just the individual and his or her immediate social community. Dewey's project of conditioning had expanded from the child to the whole adult population. This of course fitted perfectly into the core imperative of the managerial regime, which seeks constantly to draw more and more aspects of existence into the tender embrace of its fussing expertise. But the development of the therapeutic state also conveniently allowed the managerial elite to further marginalize, and indeed pathologize, their middle-American class enemies. Now the rubes weren't only backwards, they were mentally broken and unstable. Only by washing their psyches and adopting all the same thoughts, beliefs, and liberal ways of living as the professional managerial class could they possibly hope to be cured.

As Christopher Lasch noted in his 1991 book on progressivism, *The True and Only Heaven*, Adorno and his therapeutic legacy thus "substituted a medical for a political idiom and

relegated a broad range of controversial issues to the clinic – to 'scientific' study as opposed to philosophical and political debate. This procedure had the effect of making it unnecessary to discuss moral and political questions on their merits." Only the irrationality of the insane could now possibly explain disagreement with the progressive managerial project. Much as under communism in China and the Soviet Union, dissent became dismissible as deviance.

And deviance meant fascism. So, with the bourgeoisie clearly in danger of exploding into the goose step at any moment, a [friend-enemy distinction](#) could be established: one was either rationally for progressive managerialism – aka "liberal democracy" – or against it, and therefore automatically an irrational ally of authoritarianism and a dangerous threat to society. "Anti-fascism" could now take on the same meaning and function as under Mao: tarring any opponent of the managerial regime's revolutionary project as someone necessary to preemptively destroy, not debate.

For if "the whole post-fascist period is one of clear and present danger," as the Frankfurt School's Herbert Marcuse (who worked directly for the OSS from 1943-50) asserted in his landmark essay "Repressive Tolerance," then America's tradition of civil liberties and liberal neutrality could justifiably be revised to head off the threat of fascism's resurgence. A truly "liberating tolerance" would then come to entail "withdrawal of tolerance from regressive movements, and discriminatory tolerance in favor of progressive tendencies." Progress and justice would in fact presuppose "the withdrawal of civil rights from those who prevent their exercise" (i.e. "movements from the Right"). Meanwhile "true pacification [of pre-fascists] requires the withdrawal of tolerance before the deed, at the stage of communication in word, print, and picture." Such an envisioned censorship regime, aimed at "breaking the tyranny of public opinion," would be a first step towards fostering an enlightened "democratic educational dictatorship" guided by those few who have "learned to think rationally and autonomously." While such an "extreme suspension of the right of free speech and free assembly" would be "indeed justified only if the whole of society is in extreme danger," Marcuse, like the rest of the intelligentsia, could point to his colleague Adorno's redefinition of fascism to maintain "that our society is in such an emergency situation, and that it has become the normal state of affairs." Only a few decades later Marcuse's intellectual descendants would get their chance to begin fully capitalizing on this state of exception in the name of anti-fascism.

But the development of the therapeutic state would in the meantime have even deeper long-term consequences for the foundations of American democracy.

Infantilization and the End of Self-Governance

The opposite of managerialism is self-governance. Self-governance (or "self-government" or "self-rule") has two meanings. At least for Americans, the first of these that comes to mind is typically the political: the freedom of "we the people" to govern ourselves, collectively making our own decisions as a distinct localized community or nation about what should happen within that community or nation, without yielding sovereignty of decision-making to some distant, foreign, or colonial authority. Self-government in this sense was *the* core founding ideal of the United States of America. It not only prompted the War of Independence that sought sovereignty from British rule, but also structured the federal republic of independently governed states that was then established.

But self-governance can also apply to the level of the individual. A self-governing individual is one willing and able to make his own decisions about what to think and do, and how to do it, rather than automatically looking to some external authority to do these things for him. To do so he must have first developed some trust in his own ability and authority to judge the truth, decide, and act, as well as the courage to accept and take on risk. He must have some faith in his own skill, agency, and ability to accomplish things in the world (including through cooperation with others) and to thereby influence his own fate and that of his community. In psychological terms he has an internal rather than external [locus of control](). In other words, he must possess a certain degree of self-reliance.

To be capable of this, however, an individual must also first be capable of exercising reason to subordinate more immediate or baser urges, desires, and emotions to the accomplishment of higher and longer-term objectives. He must be able to endure the pang of delayed gratification; the pain of physical labor necessary to build something; the frustrations and injuries of learning a new skill; the irritations and confusions of forming and maintaining complex human relationships; the emotional discomfort of hearing or speaking difficult but necessary truths, and so on. Without being capable of this kind of self-restraint, self-discipline, and self-mastery he is in fact incapable of acting with genuine agency. Instead, if he does not rule over his passions, then – in one of the most ancient and consistent insights of classical philosophy – he is enslaved by them. True liberty in the classical sense is therefore not the freedom for the individual to have or do whatever he wants whenever he feels compelled to want it, but liberty from the despotism of desire, which makes the sovereignty of reason and morality impossible. Thus in a real sense self-government first requires governance of the self. This is why self-regulation has historically always been considered the

true mark of maturity – of readiness to constructively participate in public life – and the lack of it a sure sign of continued childishness.

As below, so above: a people incapable of personal self-governance will be incapable of self-organizing and political self-governance. Instead they will forever need – and desire – a political mother or father to rule over them, provide for them, and make decisions about what is best for them. Only by honing their own capacity for the virtues of self-governance will they be fit to rule themselves. And as above, so below: a people completely managed and provided for from above, as if they were children, won't have the opportunity to develop the true liberty of personal and communal self-governance, instead remaining forever dependent, manipulated, and enslaved.

For the ancient Greeks and Romans the highest possible conception of liberty was thus to live as part of a self-governing polity made up of self-governing individuals. This old idea was then taken and expanded on by John Locke and, among others, the American Founders. Americans became admired as the remarkable epitome of a self-governing people precisely because of their inseparable combination of self-reliance, collective self-organizing, and the system of political self-rule that these virtues supported.

The rise of managerialism and the therapeutic state changed all that. From the family up, even the most close-knit self-organized communities – Edmund Burke's "little platoons" – were steadily broken down by the managerial regime and its relentless internal colonization and centralization. Decision-making power and responsibility was transferred from individuals, families, and communities to distant bureaucracies and credentialed experts, and action made subservient to an inscrutable thicket of abstract rules and regulations. Meanwhile the therapeutic state quickly integrated itself throughout all sectors of the managerial system as the modern therapeutic conception of the "self" – some ineffable inner deity to be constantly attended to, followed, satiated, and worshiped – merged seamlessly with the tenets of managerial ideology and the material imperatives of managerial capitalism.

As Philip Rieff noted in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (1966), the promotion of consumerism through the incessant conversion of wants into needs helped convince the majority that comfort and entertainment of the self and its desires was the "highest good." Meanwhile the therapeutic state vilified any repression of the self (i.e. self-control) as something harmful and ideologically dangerous. Managerial liberationism thus worked hand-in-hand with the market to progressively strip away norms and traditions that encouraged self-restraint. Freedom and liberty were reduced to pleasures made available for consumption by what Rieff

described as "an eternal interim ethic of release" from social discipline and moral prohibitions. More and more such restraints would have to be found and torn apart so as to enjoy further release.

But as Lasch once pointed out, "the atrophy of informal controls leads irresistibly to the expansion of bureaucratic controls." The less the people are willing and able to practice self-governance individually and collectively, the more formal rules and systems of external authority will step in to micromanage what they want and how they behave. Greater moral and social anarchy tends to produce more, not less, state control.

The counter-culture revolution of the 1960s and its "anti-authoritarian" quest to "liberate" the self from restraints therefore served the managerial regime perfectly. It swiftly broke down traditional informal bonds of stable, resilient communities that had for centuries helped to shelter individuals, and tore up moral norms that had helped them structure and discipline their lives without the aid of the state. So liberated, the self-expressive individual was made a king in name, but left far more isolated, alone, and vulnerable in actuality. Such an atomized individual proved far easier pickings for the mass corporation, which swooped in to offer all manner of ready-to-purchase replacements for what was once the social commons, and for the state, which acted on demand to guarantee the sovereignty of these liberated selves and protect them from their own choices. Their capacity for self-governance thus degraded, and encouraged to think of themselves as reliant on the state for their freedom, the public's demands for management by a higher authority then only increased relentlessly.

Not surprisingly, the 1960s produced a great explosion of bureaucratic administration in America, with the state happily taking on a series of grand social management projects, including the War on Poverty, the Great Society, and Civil Rights law. These not only turbocharged the growth of the administrative apparatus, but also proved fundamental to propelling the managerial system's expansion beyond the confines of the state, greatly enhancing the managerial role of non-profit organizations and compelling the creation of such innovates as the modern Human Resources department, which now serves essentially as a compliance arms of the managerial state within nearly every private sector firm.

But even these utopian projects may have been less significant to the expansion of managerialism than the deeper psycho-political transformation of Americans that they reflected: from a people who fiercely valued their agency and self-governing independence to a people conditioned to eagerly trade away any essential liberty for security. A new de facto social contract had been established: the people would offer compliance to being managed,

and in return the managerial regime would provide them with ever greater comfort and safety, not only physical but psychological.

Today America is hardly alone in this regard. When COVID-19 first emerged China's managerial regime immediately imposed [draconian containment measures](#) in the name of public safety, locking entire cities in their homes, shuttering whole economic sectors, and splitting up families while dragging them off to quarantine camps. It continued these self-destructive national policies for three years after it had become scientifically clear that the virus was relatively mild and posed no health risks anywhere near necessitating that level of response. But as the virus began to spread around the world, managerial states in the West notably looked to China not with dismay, but with admiration. Still, they initially assumed the people of the West would never accept such a level of managerial control by their regimes. As Professor Neil Ferguson, who directed Britain's early COVID response, [admitted](#) in a 2020 interview, public health bureaucrats wanted to adopt China's "innovative intervention" but initially dismissed it as something Western people simply wouldn't tolerate. But they were mistaken: "It's a communist one-party state, we said. We couldn't get away with it in Europe, we thought… and then Italy did it. And we realized we could," Ferguson gloated. A majority of the British people in fact clamored for the security of managed life under lockdown ([and still do](#)). And so the "sense of what is possible in terms of control changed quite dramatically" in the West, Ferguson explained. Soon countries across the Western world had adopted and imposed the Chinese model.

This should not have been a surprise. Safetyism is utterly typological of managerial societies everywhere, soft or hard, in Sacramento or Shanghai. At the top, a managerial elite is naturally obsessed with total control – with running society like their envisioned machine – and with stamping out any unpredictability, unsurveilled activity, or willful resistance. For the professional managerial middle, doubting or deviating from the rules and procedures of the bureaucratic machine is not so much inconceivable as unimaginably immoral and déclassé: for the pious apparatchik, conforming to the machine and its expert models is the core of good citizenship and personal advancement, while independent decision-making is fraught with risk; "computer says no" is practically a deferral to sacred law.[13] From below, the social atomization, empty relativistic nihilism, and [learned helplessness](#) produced by managerialism cultivates in the masses a constant state of anxiety; in an attempt to relieve this anxiety many among them then themselves demand greater and greater managerial control over life be exercised from above. A cycle of co-dependency is created, which accelerates as the managerial regime discovers it can constantly prop up new objects of fear from which to

generously protect the public. The regime becomes a devouring mother, projecting weakness onto her children in order to keep them attached and under her sway.

The "New Man" desired by managerialism is not a man at all, but an infant: dependent and incapable of self-governance; needy and consumptive; a blank slate, malleable and suggestible; loving and trusting of the caretakers it assumes to be omnipotent and compassionate – the perfect managerial subject. Preserving such a state of immaturity makes possible a historically new, all-consuming kind of regime.

An Immense and Tutelary Power

When Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of his experiences travelling America in the 1830s, he struggled to name the dark future he foresaw would likely come to threaten the young country, as "the species of oppression by which democratic nations are menaced is unlike anything that ever before existed in the world." He sought "in vain for an expression that will accurately convey the whole of the idea," for "the old words despotism and tyranny are inappropriate" to describe it, he wrote. In his vision he saw "an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike," and all "incessantly endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives." And, "Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest," with each man existing "only in himself and for himself alone." In this atomized and disorganized state, even "if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country," for:

> Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks, on the contrary, to keep them in perpetual childhood: it is well content that the people should rejoice, provided they think of nothing but rejoicing. For their happiness such a government willingly labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness; it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances: what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living?

> Thus it every day renders the exercise of the free agency of man less useful and less frequent; it circumscribes the will within a narrower range and gradually robs a man of all

> the uses of himself. The principle of equality has prepared men for these things; it has predisposed men to endure them and often to look on them as benefits.
>
> After having thus successively taken each member of the community in its powerful grasp and fashioned him at will, the supreme power then extends its arm over the whole community. It covers the surface of society with a network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate, to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.

What Tocqueville had uniquely intimated in his time was the character of the soft managerial regime, whose first seeds had already been planted in America. Rather than brutalizing and terrorizing the public into compliance as would a hard regime, this "mild" (yet "absolute") power would find it far easier to sedate, seduce, and propagandize them. But the desired end result would be the same: a population demoralized and conditioned to accept management of all things under heaven.

And yet, the more the public has been successfully kept "in perpetual childhood," the more the regime – being no true loving parent – has come to view them only with pure contempt and to treat them with complete disregard. Not all have taken it politely. A good portion of the more willful children still refuse to behave and keep rebelling against their teachers. Despite much effort, the *demos* so far still hasn't been made safe for democracy. What is to be done? Using force on these holdouts doubtless grows more and more tempting, along with more and more rigorous forms of conditioning and control. Exchanging some tricks of the managerial trade with harder, crueler siblings may therefore seem like an increasingly necessary and natural evolution for our managerial order.

Part III: Stability Maintenance

Managerial technocracy has a big problem: it doesn't really work. Building the Tower of Babel never works, because not everything can be completely controlled by human cleverness. The larger and more enveloping the system of control grows, the more complex it becomes. The more complex it becomes, the exponentially more difficult it becomes to control. Entropy and dysfunction inexorably creep into the system; addressing one problem then only creates multiple new, unexpected problems; the tower begins to wobble.

Naturally, the system tries with increasing fervor to paper over any such cracks with new layers of management, which of course only increase complexity and begin over time to divorce the system from reality. People living in such a system have a habit of eventually noticing the contradictions between insistent official claims to stability and the fact that they can feel the tower swaying beneath their feet; in time this gap in reality helps create the twisted sense of absurdity common to life in such regimes. The proliferation of this [absurdity](#) by no means fazes the managerial regime. Inevitably, however, the regime begins to face an extended crisis of legitimacy. It cannot resolve this crisis, as it isn't something that can be solved through the application of more management. The regime's only claim to legitimacy is special expertise in generating endless progress, including ever more material efficiency and the more complete fulfillment of desires. But desires are infinite, while managerialism itself becomes inimical even to efficiency. The only real goal and method of managerialism is to expand management, and management itself produces nothing except further artificial complexity. So at some point the self-serving expansion of managerial bureaucracy overtakes any gains in organizational efficiency produced by the application of managerial technique.

Nonetheless, the managerial regime is capable of only one response to the emergence of such instability, which is to double down: more top-down control; more layers of management; more insistent claims to expert knowledge; more efforts to spare the people "all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living"; more clearing away of any perceived resistance to utopia. This may be labeled as progressive and modernizing reform. Genuine effective reform – paring back centralization and management, easing off universalism, releasing and devolving control to allow for local differentiation and adaptation to reality, as well as

generally adopting at least a little humility – is of course an impossibility, as that would mean going "backwards," admitting fallibility, and accepting the limits of managerialism.

This is absolutely not to say, however, that managerial regimes are incapable of sophisticated adaptations to effectively (if temporarily) suppress instability, or that they are necessarily short-lived. To assume that any given regime is weak or on the verge of collapse would be a mistake; the mass-scale managerial regime is mostly a modern phenomenon, and so far only one (the USSR) has collapsed absent military intervention. So we do not really know how long an especially clever managerial system can endure, even if we know it won't be forever. What we can assume is that any regime will act automatically to defend itself and its interests against proliferating threats. It will likely not hesitate to evolve and adopt new methods in order to do so, just as it has evolved repeatedly in the past. New means of everyday repression, or what the CCP regime likes to call "stability maintenance," will quickly be found and trialed.

Today this imperative of stability maintenance is driving a rapid and mutually productive convergence between the world's hard and soft managerial regimes, with the hard becoming softer (that is to say, more subtle and clever, not less cruel) and the soft becoming harder (more forceful, coercive, and unabashed).

Permanent Revolution

The first step towards stability is to break things. For the managerial regime, stability of course means unquestioning public compliance with managerial authority. Blocking such complete managerial power is, as always, all those spheres of authority that could possibly compete with the regime: i.e. any remaining stable institutions, communities, independent economic networks, religions, norms, traditions, and ways of life that make possible and encourage self-governance – or at least organization and decision-making outside and independent of the managerial Borg. These obstacles, these recalcitrant remains of the old order, stand in the way of change, of consolidation, of reconstruction, of progress… so they must go; they must be smashed!

This leveling of any source of oppositional power is a constant imperative for any managerial regime. As the French political philosopher Bertrand de Jouvenel explained in his timeless work on the rise of managerial nation-states, *On Power: The Natural History of Its Growth* (1948), Power (the regime) finds that, by its very nature, it cannot but seek to relentlessly break down all separations and barriers in its way and gather together all other possible nodes and

sources of power into itself, or destroy them. "All command other than its own, that is what irks Power," as he wrote. Meanwhile, "All [human productive] energy, wherever it may be found, that is what nourishes it." The regime "finds itself impelled" to break open established and independent communities in order to consume their power in "as natural a tendency as that which causes a bear in search of honey to break the cells of the hive."

Pictured: the managerial state discovers your thriving independent community.

This means conservative preservation of old customs and forms and legal structures is always utterly inimical to the managerial regime's objectives and nature. Although it may speak of some fixed and flawless utopian future, it advances and grows in power not through order and preservation but through repeatedly [shaking things up](#) and breaking more than a few eggs along the way. To adapt Marx: the managerial class is either *revolutionary* or it is nothing. Indeed the managerial regime inherently subscribes to Hegel and Mao's program of "continuous" or "permanent revolution."

The managerial revolution was not a singular event that occurred only once in history; instead it is a process that has happened – is happening – repeatedly, and in relatively distinct waves. In fact, in America these waves seem to reoccur on a fairly regular schedule: about once every 20-25 years, or approximately once per generation. Wilson's Progressive era of the 1910s was followed by the era of FDR's New Deal and WWII mobilization beginning in the 30s, which was in turn superseded by the Great Society/Civil Rights era of the 60s. Then came the Regan-Clinton neoliberal era beginning in the 80s, which – and I'm afraid this may be difficult for many conservatives to hear – achieved brilliant, if more subtle, revolutionary success by using privatization to economically and socially destabilize and break apart surviving tight-knit, self-governing communities and institutions in exchange only for an illusory reduction in managerial state power (produced by handing off that power to

managerial corporations instead). Each of these periods of revolution has been followed by a quieter, illusory "conservative" period of consolidation, only for revolution to explode again a couple of decades later.

Which brings us to the fifth and most ambitious wave of managerial revolution, which we are living through today in the 2010s-20s: the Great Awokening.

"Wokeism" is a Marxism-derived ideology/radical religious cult that seeks to establish heaven on earth (the utopia of universal "social justice") through the simultaneous and total liberation of all those who are "oppressed." This is to be accomplished through the creation of a New Woke Man (they/them) awakened through a process of reeducation into a *new consciousness* of their oppression, the subsequent seizure and redistribution of all power from "oppressor" groups, and the sweeping away or inversion of all established hierarchies, moral norms, and other "social constructs" of the past that place any limits on infinite self-creation of identity and broader reality. It is absolutely revolutionary to its core.

So at first glance it might seem like an odd choice of ideology for all of the institutions of the establishment to enthusiastically and simultaneously adopt and promote, as they swiftly did after 2016. Doesn't the state want order and control, not revolution? Don't corporations want a flourishing environment for free-market capitalism, not Marxist grievance and street violence? Don't academics want to preserve the tranquility of their ivory tower so as to pursue truth (*haha*)? Don't the elite in general inherently want to maintain the status quo of their rule, not advocate its overthrow? Doubtless many casual observers may be confused by the idea of a *revolutionary regime.[14]*

But this shouldn't be such a mystery. Wokeism poses no threat to the basis of the managerial regime – quite the opposite. First of all, it is a radical but straightforward extension of soft managerial ideology. It maintains and advances all of the same core tenets (remember those?): scientism, utopianism, meliorism, liberationism, hedonism, cosmopolitanism, and dematerialization (to which we could arguably add safetyism, as described earlier). Secondly, its goal of instantiating a new victimological consciousness and reconstructing human nature is perfectly in line with the objectives and methods of the therapeutic state.

Most importantly, Wokeism provides the regime with an ideal opportunity to fulfill the *revolutionary dialectic*. What is that? Without attempting to explain all the details of dialectical materialism, let's just say that, like Hegel, Mao thought the Revolution must never end because all progress (towards New Socialist Man and communism, but mainly towards more

power) was the product of the transformation produced by struggle between opposing forces in society. If there was no struggle, there could be no progress, as all progress was produced through the same dialectical process: *unity -> disunity -> unity.*

In other words a new, firmer order is produced through the chaos of disorder; you break things so you can replace them with new things of your choosing. Or as Mao put it in a letter to his wife in 1966 when he decided to kick off China's hugely destructive Cultural Revolution (mainly so as to consolidate his own waning personal power) the method was to stir up "great disorder under heaven" for the purpose of creating "great order under heaven." Only through the emergency of chaos and mass disruption could he find the latitude to take bold action, make sweeping changes, eliminate rivals, reorder allegiances, and seize control of new power centers in ways that would previously have been impossible. (Hence why he is reputed to have remarked during the height of the bloody madness that, "Everything under heaven is in utter chaos; the situation is excellent.")

This dialectic can work at any level. As a simple hypothetical example, let's say you're a political bureaucrat and you want to seize factional control over a department of police so as to wield them as your personal jackbooted thugs. That might ordinarily be pretty difficult, since the public would complain, the department itself is an established institution with rules, and it is already filled with seasoned men loyal to an existing hierarchy who are united in not liking or trusting you, you little psychopath. But there's a way: you find a reason to have the department defunded, forcing most of those disagreeable people to leave and find other work during this difficult fiscal crisis; now the streets are overrun with crime and all is chaos under heaven, so the public angrily demands you re-fund the police and enforce some law and order; you graciously acquiesce and fund the department – in fact, you, a champion of the people, double its budget, hiring all your chosen thugs, and at generous salaries. Presto! The department is back bigger than ever, but now loyal to your patronage. Through disunity has emerged a new unity.

Broadly speaking, establishing a new, more centralized and tighter order is the whole goal of every revolution. The iron-fisted tyranny of a Mao, a Stalin, or a Napoleon is not some unfortunate accident of well-intentioned revolution gone wrong, *it's the point.*

The goal of the Woke revolution is not "deconstruction," lawlessness, and social chaos forever; it's the forceful refounding of a new and far more totalizing order. The managerial regime quickly intuited that this ideology, which it found lying around in a squalid corner of academia (its specific lineage doesn't really much matter), presented an ideal tool for

destroying its enemies and extending its power and control, and so opportunistically picked it up and adopted it as a hammer with which to smash things.

Wokeism is embraced by the managerial regime – without which it would have gone nowhere – because it appeals directly to the self-interest of every managerial sector. For the managerial intelligentsia, it offers whole new fields of policy in which everyone must defer to their coded knowledge and special expertise. For the managerial media, a whole new civilizing mission to constantly inform the masses about how backwards they are and to correct them at every turn. For managerial philanthropy, endless new crusades to alleviate infinite oppressions. For managerial corporations, new frontiers of hedonistic liberation, featuring whole new habits to sell as consumer needs ("gender affirming care" is very profitable!) And best of all, for the managerial state, a swollen portion of the population who, with every new expansive claim to infantile victimhood, constantly beg the technocratic state and its proxies to step in to enforce "justice" and manage the emergency of their individual right to "safety" in every circumstance, in every sphere of life, and in every human interaction, from the workplace, to romantic and family relationships, right down to their emotional state and every word they hear spoken or read on the internet.

Then there are the [Black Categories](#), the reactionary bourgeoisie, the fascists of the working and middle class, who can now also be branded as white supremacists and all other manner of 'phobes, and then be righteously beaten down and tormented and isolated and surveilled and dispossessed anew for their deplorable bigotry and hatred. Oh, how the tired old class struggle has been reinvigorated to provide such delicious new moral delights!

The regime views this ideology as providing a convenient new source of legitimacy at a time when that legitimacy has been threatened: now every sector of the regime is necessary to ensure "equity" (equality of outcomes) between individuals in all respects (social justice), and to protect them from evil (opposition to social justice, i.e. the regime). Moreover, this morally justifies the complete abandonment of official institutional neutrality towards the regime's opposition, and their political rights, at least the appearance of which was previously required by the now superseded philosophy of liberalism. Yes, this angers the opposition, but the opposition is weak and timid and their actions can always be twisted to fit the chosen narrative and used to further isolate them. Combined with the opportunity to advance its core revolutionary drive, these benefits have made Wokeism potentially the single most useful conceptual evolution ever adopted by Western managerialism.

And the structure of the new unity that Woke managerialism intends to establish, if successful in this phase of the revolution, is quite clear. Its outlines are obvious, for example, in the [proposal](#) by one of America's most celebrated Woke theoreticians, Ibram X. Kendi, for the passage of "an anti-racist constitutional amendment" that would make unconstitutional "racial inequity" and "racist ideas by public officials," and "establish and permanently fund [a] Department of Anti-racism (DOA) comprised of formally trained experts on racism and no political appointees." This DOA would be "responsible for preclearing all local, state and federal public policies to ensure they won't yield racial inequity, monitor those policies, investigate private racist policies when racial inequity surfaces, and monitor public officials for expressions of racist ideas. The DOA would be empowered with disciplinary tools to wield over and against policymakers and public officials who do not voluntarily change their racist policy and ideas." In other words: a sweeping new order of total managerial control, policing even our most intimate affairs and the most private wrongthink, and overseen by a permanent unelected and unaccountable superstructure of "formally trained experts."

Would any Western government really go this far? Of course they will, if they can, for the bear hungers after that sweet, sweet honey. In fact, with Wokeism having quickly spread beyond America, other managerial regimes in the West, [such as Ireland](#) (and [the whole EU](#)), are already rushing ahead of the United States to begin codifying similarly far-reaching plans into law. This should not surprise us; it's simply the telos of managerialism – even the soft, liberal kind of managerialism. Like de Tocqueville, de Jouvenel foresaw the direction life under managerialism was headed:

> Where does it all lead to, this unending war waged by Power against the other authorities which society throws up? Will the jaws of the great boa constrictor of human energies ever cease to close on all who in turn put these energies to their use? Where will it end? In the destruction of all other command for the benefit of one alone – that of the state. In each man's absolute freedom from every family and social authority, a freedom the price of which is complete submission to the state. In the complete equality as between themselves of all citizens, paid for by their equal abasement before the power of their absolute master – the state. In the disappearance of every constraint which does not emanate from the state, and in the denial of every pre-eminence which is not approved by the state. In a word, it ends in the atomization of society, and in the rupture of every private tie linking man and man, whose only bond is now their common bondage to the state. *The extremes of individualism and socialism meet: that was their predestined course.*

Although the master of our atomized masses wouldn't turn out to be fully recognizable merely as "the state," his warning nonetheless stands: the end point of managerialism's revolutionary hunger for total control is necessarily totalitarian: all within the regime, nothing outside the regime, nothing against the regime.

The Extreme Center, the Securitization of Everything, and Rule by Law

So, facing a crisis of popular legitimacy, managerial elites across the West have, in the name of resisting "fascism," saving "democracy," and achieving universal safety and social justice, begun to employ a wave of revolutionary methods to transform their regimes into even vaster Hobbesian monstrosities of compliance and control. No specific plot or conspiracy is [necessarily needed](#) to explain this; only the nature of managerialism.

Fortunately this project has not yet fully succeeded. It has encountered some unexpected democratic resistance from middle-class "populism," which has at least somewhat slowed its transformational march. Nor can it yet openly operate outside the framework of the old democratic order and the lingering moral legitimacy that moldy shroud still provides. The regime must continue to advance mainly through existing mechanisms of legal and civic authority. Hence the upside-down world of our present transitional period, in which the new order constantly and loudly insists its mission is to defend the old order even as it dismantles it.

This playacting is aided by the fact that – [being essentially nihilistic](#) – modern managerialism is difficult to place on the traditional left-right political spectrum, at least as most people understand it.[15] It is certainly left-wing in the sense that it is progressive and revolutionary, and therefore definitively anti-conservative. But it is not really egalitarian or communitarian, which many assume the left must embody. Though the regime may trumpet these principles in rhetoric, in reality its vision of technocratic rule is firmly oligarchic, aligning the few against the many. It is certainly not anti-imperial or anti-war. Nor is it anti-capitalist, at least in the sense that it encourages market activity and facilitates the accumulation of immense private wealth by the few. But it is hardly libertarian either: the most reliable way to wealth is a crony patronage relationship with the state, and no matter how wealthy or independent-minded they may be, an individual tycoon or corporation remains entangled by the tentacles of the administrative state and the wider bureaucratic managerial regime. And, disdaining human virtue, excellence, and agency, it firmly rejects the hierarchical, aristocratic virtues of the right in favor of an infantile, easily managed radical individualism – in doing so essentially making a horseshoe back to collectivism. In the end managerialism combines, as

de Jouvenel said, "the extremes of individualism and socialism" alike. This helps to confuse and disguise its radical nature and allow it to consistently drape itself in the shimmering cloak of the reasonable, moderate, representative middle, whether the "center-left" or "center-right." Of course it is actually none of these things, except the center of power.

The "extreme center" is therefore potentially a useful descriptive term here. The term identifies the concentration of power into a single "establishment" or ruling class that is united by shared interests (no matter how many formal political parties this may include), and which portrays itself as the dispassionate voice of moderation and reason facing off against the "extremes" (any opposition outside this bloc). In this situation politics becomes a struggle not between two or more parties or factions debating which specific policies of government to implement, but a defense of the inner against the outer, of the center vs. the periphery.[16] The center defines the window of "normal," "legitimate," or acceptable policies and opinions, while the periphery and its views are painted as dangerous, illegitimate, and unacceptable for consideration or compromise (no matter how much popular support they may embody). Ideological clarity or constancy is of little importance here; the only unifying goal of the center's bloc is to protect its comfortable monopolization of decision-making and status by excluding or subjugating anyone who might challenge its collective interests.

The center, having thus transformed politics into a psychodrama of its civilized struggle against surrounding barbarians, becomes willing to take radical action to maintain the stability of its control, no matter how much it disrupts and destroys in the process. This includes actively anti-democratic, extra-constitutional, or otherwise norm-breaking actions that are justified as necessary to defend norms (read: the norm of establishment control). Like a body with an autoimmune disorder, over time the center becomes extreme in its self-protective behavior, potentially undermining its own legitimacy and societal stability in the process. This of course only makes it more paranoid about the need to maintain strict control of power.[17]

This paranoia engenders a sense of being under siege, along with a feedback loop that produces a steady slide into more and more suspicion and perceived need for greater security (this dovetails perfectly with the processes of bureaucratization and safetyism discussed earlier). Soon everything has become a matter of security. And once something becomes a matter of security, it becomes a matter of existential necessity, and therefore suitable for *exception* from the established processes and rules of collective decision-making and accountability (democratic or otherwise), given that in an emergency it is justifiable to suspend normal procedures for the sake of expediency. But of course once everything is a

matter of security everything becomes an emergency, and so anything is justified – *permanent emergency* becomes a procedural basis for governance.[18]

Unusual as it may be to think of it this way, today the Chinese Communist Party is, in a sense, an extreme example of an extreme center regime, including in its paranoia and securitization. Despite what's written on the tin, the CCP doesn't seem to be in any particular hurry to achieve the promised paradise of communism. It has, after all, engaged in decades of capitalist reforms in order to get rich. Let's just say its ideological interpretation has proven flexible over time. If for example you're part of a Marxist student group in China today and are naïve enough to try to organize discontented local sweatshop laborers into an independent union, as foolish students there do now and then, you will be arrested faster than you can shout "workers of the world unite!" That's because, just as de Jouvenel would have predicted, the one thing the CCP is absolutely *not* flexible about is its complete and eternal control over all power in the country.

In China the vortex of the extreme center has consumed all available political and civic space. Only the Party and its members can be permitted any power to organize or make decisions, and all the key institutions of the country – such as the military (the People's Liberation Army) – must pledge their absolute loyalty specifically to the Party, not to the state or the nation (the people). This instinct to keep all power concentrated into the hands of the Party Center is inherent to the CCP's Leninist roots but is also part and parcel of its extreme centrism and broader managerial nature.

So too is its obsession with maintaining what General Secretary Xi Jinping describes as "Total Security." As of writing, this Chinese "national security concept" encompasses at least 16 different officially declared priority areas in which security is to be strictly maintained as a priority, including "military security," "economic security," "technological security," "information security," "cultural security," "ecological security," "health security," and so on. At the top of the list is "political security," which is described as the "bedrock" of the Party, the state, and all of Chinese society. Political security means no one is ever able to threaten the power of the Center.

Now also ruled by an extreme center, the United States has unsurprisingly begun to develop its own milder case of this "securitization of everything" in recent decades. This started in earnest after 9/11 and accelerated after 2016 with the manufactured panic over "foreign" election interference and "disinformation." (China is also notably quick to accuse "hostile foreign forces" of being behind every embarrassment and setback for the regime.) Then came

the Great Awokening, the 2020 election year, and COVID. Securitization began reaching more "total" levels. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), a new government body so besotted with security that its name includes the word twice, has for example [embraced](#) as its mission the need to use mass censorship of public and private communications to secure not only America's network infrastructure but also its "political infrastructure" and even its "cognitive infrastructure" – i.e. the minds of every American. The therapeutic state has begun to merge with the security state.

This securitization of everything has been effective. By appealing to fear, the regime has been able to at least temporarily place its legitimacy crisis into a state of suspended animation by deflecting attention from its own faults and failures and justifying its own turn to increasingly extreme behavior. The incentive to emphasize foreign threats is particularly strong because it allows domestic opponents to be associated with foreign enemies, potentially to such a degree that the distinction can be blurred and their rights as citizens then effectively revoked.

Most importantly, the securitization of everything by the extreme center has eased America's ongoing transition to a *rule by law* system. Not to be confused with rule *of* law, rule by law is another useful CCP concept. On one level, rule by law is simply a recognition that in order to maintain stability and a "harmonious" (compliant) society, there need to be laws on the books, and people generally need to be made to follow them. This is called "law-based governance," and Xi Jinping has made strengthening it through greater professionalization of the legal-administrative system a key priority for China's development. At the same time, however, the rule by law concept explicitly rejects the "erroneous Western thought" encapsulated by the phrase "no one is above the law." How can anything be *above* the rule of the CCP? There can be no rule of law over the Party Center, because the law is only a set of procedures, a tool of governance. "To fully govern the country by law," Xi has explained, means "to strengthen and improve the Party's leadership" and to "ensure the effective implementation of the Party's line, principles, and policies through rule by law." The whole point of law is to facilitate the rule of the Party, so of course the Party's leadership is above the law.

This is only logical: if the law is a tool of human management, how can it restrict and rule over the managers who create it? Laws exist to rule the ruled; if rulers choose to exempt themselves from rules [that's not "hypocrisy," just power](#). After all, [sovereign is he who decides the exception](#). An appeal to the supremacy of "the law" (or that "no one is above the law") is, when you think about it, a rather weird idea: it is only conceivable if even the highest of earthly powers accepts that there is some even higher power (whether a God or some other

transcendent, unchanging, and just order which the law itself reflects) that can and will hold them accountable, in this life or the next, for defiling the spirit of the law (justice). Absent such a power the rule of law is nonsensical and only rule by law remains. Managerialism of course cannot permit or even conceive of any power higher than itself; its entire *raison d'être* is to reorder and control all of existence, and to accept that anything is beyond its reach would undermine its whole basis. Therefore *managerialism and rule of law cannot coexist.*

So, in a rule by law America, laws (a great jungle of them) would still be on the books, but their interpretation and application would inevitably vary extensively in order to best suit the managerial regime in any given situation. Since, just like in China, their purpose would be to "ensure the effective implementation of the Party's line, principles, and policies through rule by law," when and to whom laws are applied would be largely determined on the same inside vs. outside basis that defines the extreme center. Subjective interpretation of the law – as meaning one thing one day, another the next – would be not only acceptable but absolutely necessary so long as the purpose of the law (to protect the center and progress its managerial project) were to remain fixed as the guiding principle. Building vague and expansive language into the law to facilitate this would become the norm, much as the Chinese regime regularly makes use of laws against such ill-defined crimes as "spreading rumors" or "stirring up trouble" to flexibly do away with problematic people as needed. And selective use of the law as a factional weapon (aka "lawfare") to undermine or destroy outsider political and class enemies, while sheltering insider allies, would become not only ethically permissible, but practically the civic responsibility of the center's ruling elite.

Thus the law would become merely an arm of the managerial regime's revolutionary dialectic. This, perhaps more than any other symptom, would confirm and solidify the transition from a representative multi-party democracy to a one-party state.

The One-Party State and the United Front

China is a one-party state. Only the members of one political party, the Chinese Communist Party, are permitted to hold any positions of power (though a collection of small "independent" parties exist for show). This state of affairs is a step beyond extreme centrism, if also its logical conclusion.

But what is the nature of a one-party state, really? Grasping that requires understanding not just the one-party but the party-state. The *party-state*, a spontaneous feature of nearly every revolutionary regime in history, is a unique form of government. It is sometimes described as

a system in which one dominant political group functions as a "state within a state." But in the case of a fully mature party-state like China's this description would be misleading, since the Chinese regime is more like a political party with a state attached.

The People's Republic of China operates through what is sometimes known as a "dual track" regime system. There is a national state (the government), and officials are appointed to occupy positions in it. But parallel to and overarching the formal state hierarchy is an entire shadow edifice of positions within the Party system. Every ranking official must also be a Party member in good standing (officially there are approximately 98 million CCP members), every state position has what is essentially a corresponding Party position, and often the same individual occupies both positions. For example Xi Jinping is both President of China and General Secretary of the CCP. In every case the Party position out-commands the state position. However, in many cases Party members hold Party positions that have no corresponding state position but nonetheless exercise tremendous power over affairs of state. And, as mentioned earlier, entire institutions that in most countries would be part of the state, such as the military, are instead Party organizations. Hence the PRC cannot be described merely as a state; it is a party-state.

A party-state is a system in which, to use Wilson's terminology, there is effectively no politics, only administration. Or rather, any political competition must happen inside the universe of the party and its ideology, while none is permitted outside of it. The destiny of the state has already been determined and there can be no debate about where the ship is headed, only the specifics of how to reach the promised land most efficiently (if that). It is a formalization of managerialism as the one and only road to progress.

In a party-state like China the party's unique role means there is no clear distinction between "state" and "non-state" – an idea that can sometimes be a difficult for citizens raised in Western democracies to grasp. Recently, for example, the communications director of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a Canadian, [resigned suddenly](#) and fled from Beijing to Tokyo, saying he feared for his safety. He reported with apparent shock that the AIIB, a multilateral development bank set up by China, is not actually an independent institution but one dominated by a group of CCP members who "operate like an internal secret police" and are "like an invisible government inside the bank." Apparently no one had explained to the poor man before he took the job that in China there can be no independent or neutral institutions – *all* major institutions are directly managed by the Party or are otherwise forced to align themselves with the Party's objectives.

Today every corporation or organization of middling size or larger operating in China, domestic or foreign, is [required](#) by law to establish an internal Party cell. These cells spend most of their time organizing your typical team-building exercises, monitoring employees' political knowledge and morale, and training them in how to "regulate their own words and actions," as Party guidelines put it. But larger firms are expected to appoint full-time Party secretaries, as well as to give recruited Party members a "big stage to fully display their talents" like a good equal-opportunity employer. And many Chinese corporations have amendments in their articles of association formally specifying that in key moments of decision, "the board of directors shall first seek the opinion of the leading Party group of the company." The Party is, one could say, just the ultimate of those "stakeholders" to which companies in a modern managerial economy are responsible.

The Party has also set up a vast network of non-Party "civil society" groups and social organizations that operate "independently" beyond the state. These are GONGOs, or "Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations." The CCP loves GONGOs, because they make the Party seem closer to and more representative of the "grassroots" of "the people." GONGOs are also used to advance CCP objectives beyond China's borders while retaining some plausible deniability that this is really the work of the Chinese government.

Coordinating all the "civil society" GONGOs, "independent" political parties, minority ethnic groups and religious authorities, public and private corporations, intellectual institutions, media outlets, etc. to keep them aligned and in lock-step with the Party is known as "united front work." Due to a few recent political scandals in places like Australia and Canada, the "united front" has [broken into Western awareness](#) as a thing, but largely only in the form of some shadowy intelligence organization running global influence operations to infiltrate and surveil populations of overseas ethnic Chinese and subvert democratic politics. This is absolutely something the united front does, but it's also much more than that.

The united front, a Leninist idea adopted by Mao, began originally as a strategy to deceptively unite the broadest possible coalition (e.g. communists with nationalists and liberal socialists) to fight against and defeat imperialist aggression, after which non-communist temporary allies were to be, as Stalin put it, "squeezed out like lemons." But the CCP soon realized the united front was way too useful to ever fully dismantle. The Party managed to use entryist tactics, subversion, and intimidation to co-opt and re-purpose many non-communist organizations, and over time it developed a whole network of front groups and fellow travelers capable of being used for "organic" mobilization on the Party's behalf. This network,

the united front, also serves to helpfully create an image of "democratic" pluralism and grassroots popular support for the Party's aims. So united front work became one of the Party's so-called "magic weapons" and the united front only continued to expand in scope. Today sections of society ranging all the way from China's tech billionaires to the Triads (Chinese mafia) have been effectively incorporated into the united front and are used for helpful patriotic purposes such as, in the gangsters' case, [beating up democratic protestors](#) in the streets or demolishing the homes of dissidents to send them a strong message (this is known as [outsourcing repression](#)). The united front is what could be genuinely described as a "whole of society" operation.

In China the united front has its own formal Party office, the United Front Work Department (UFWD), dedicated to organizing it, but the institution's role shouldn't be overstated. United front work is considered a job for the whole Party. More importantly, in a metaphorical sense the whole party-state operates as if it were all one big united front network.

That is to say that, while the CCP is very hierarchical (nobody crosses Xi Jinping or disobeys his orders), it is also remarkably quick in its ability to synchronize as a horizontal network. China is a huge country, so while Xi may want to be an emperor, he can't even know about, let alone micromanage, everything going on in the system. And yet, the whole party-state system can pivot almost instantaneously to focus on – often to the point of unhealthy fixation – and massively mobilize around new priorities as if it were a single hive mind. If the Party Center decides that the current thing is, say, [food security](#), then suddenly almost every local Party boss, newspaper, school principal, or corporate office hall monitor is going to spend at least the next month talking endlessly about the dire menace of food waste and the critical national security contribution of composting – even without being specifically directed to do so. Specific directives or formal coordination are in fact largely unnecessary. That's because the "whole of society" penetration and vast structure of the Party network allows it to automatically serve as a coordinating nervous system. And because in such a system loyalty to the Party, signaled through ideological conformity, is far more important for advancement than competency. Only the most general of ideological guidance is therefore needed to prompt Party cadres everywhere to strive (out of self-interest/self-preservation) to interpret, conform to, and at least rhetorically put into practice that guidance. As soon as the latest ideological system update is downloaded, everyone is off to the races, for better or worse.

So, does the United States, or the broader West, have its own united front? Inquiring minds doubtless want to know. At this point it is impossible not to notice the strong tendency of Western elite media, in particular, to move in near absolute synchronicity. It is no longer

unusual for a dozen different articles from different outlets to appear touting exactly the same narrative on the same topic in the same week, or even the same day. In fact this is now the norm. For the glassy-eyed talking heads on television to all repeat, with identical phraseology, *exactly* the same talking points in unison hundreds of times within days is now the industry standard. The sudden adoption of the same linguistic taboos, redefinitions, and fads. The same claims to absolute truth, along with the moral necessity of "debunking" the "misinformation" of any alternative views, followed by the sudden, simultaneous, and wholly unacknowledged and unexplained shift to some different version of absolute truth. The simultaneous identification of the same enemies and pressing threats to the public. The same individual targets singled out for simultaneous hit pieces. The same niche objects of obsessive, swooning coverage. And the same topics of great public interest mysteriously left entirely uncovered by every outlet, as if an official blackout on even the acknowledgement of their existence had been suddenly enforced from above. This is all now standard for the media.

But of course it's not only the media. The experience of having politicians, academics, major corporations, internet platforms, advertisers, entertainment companies, and all the neighbors you run into at Wholefoods all suddenly pivot to adopt the same weekly conception of facts, echo the same shibboleths, and hang the same flags of allegiance is now simply a normal, if bewildering, part of everyday life in the West. This mass, synchronistic adherence to the constantly shifting "current thing" naturally gives rise to suspicion that there must be some top-down coordination occurring. Is this the work of a united front?

Formally, no. Functionally, yes. There may not be anything like China's official, centrally administered united front organization, but there is a network and it is united and coordinated – or rather, it is *self-coordinating*. This united front network is of course the managerial regime itself. The regime is the amalgamation of all the different arms of the managerial system, and can be usefully thought of as if they were all a single institution (which has alternatively been called "[the cathedral](#)"). The many institutions of each arm demonstrably behave as if they were part of a single organizational structure, the whole structure moving arm-in-arm together.

Why is that? Who controls this unified network of institutions? No one really controls the network; the network controls everyone. *What* controls the network? A *narrative* does. All the institutions in the cathedral seem like they're singing from the same hymn sheet because they are. The essential unifying and coordinating mechanism of the managerial system is that all

its constituent parts share a single doctrinal perspective, an adherence to the same motivational memetic narrative. It speaks with one voice as an emergent property of this fact.

From the perspective of any one individual or even institution within the regime network this probably isn't how things appear. Their concerns seem much more mundane: to get ahead in their little corner of the system, accumulate some prestige, and accrue some material rewards. In fact they feel like they're in a hardscrabble competition with their peers, not singing a harmony with them. But prestige (social approval and status) is the key unseen mover here, making the whole system turn. Prestige is a reflection of recognition and selection within a given institution or system. It's the way a system indicates which individuals are considered most valuable to and therefore most valued by that system. Those with more prestige are considered higher status and offered more formal and informal opportunities because others in the system want to associate with and be associated with them. This translates into influence and rewards.

How do people know what is valued and therefore prestigious? Well, every system has an unspoken model or ideal, which people will naturally try to signal their conformity to. This ideal is molded by an overarching narrative. The narrative frames core questions for the system, such as: who are we? What do we do? Why do we do it? Why does this make us superior to other people? Who are our enemies? Etc. This narrative functions as a discourse, and through this discourse the narrative evolves over time. Being evolutionary, it features Darwinian selection: individuals or component parts of the system constantly advance narrative innovations through what they say and do; some of these have (in evolutionary terminology) more *fitness* than others, and these ideas are selected, propagated, and integrated into the narrative. Those whose ideas are selected gain prestige, while rejection leads to loss of prestige.

But what determines which narrative adaptations are fit to be carried forward? Simple: they are those that make the system stronger. Curtis Yarvin, as part of his explanation of the cathedral, describes such an adaptation, which he labels a "dominant" idea, as one that "*validates the use of power.*" The system is always eager to adopt and perpetuate such ideas or narratives. In contrast, a "recessive" idea is one that "*invalidates* power or its use." Such an idea is radioactive. As a simple example, a public health bureaucrat who advocates that the public health bureaucracy needs to be handed near unlimited power so that it can respond to the threat of a virus is a prestigious hero to the whole bureaucratic system for making them all more important and powerful. A public health bureaucrat who says publicly that the same virus isn't actually dangerous, and that no action by the public health bureaucracy is really

needed, is a traitor to the whole system. For calling into question the very necessity of public health bureaucrats, the blasphemer is going to be denounced by his peers, tagged as low-status, and have his career cut short – even if he is obviously right.

Out of self-interest, the whole system constantly rewards conformity with dominant narrative ideas and punishes dissent. The overall operating narrative is the accumulation of all the most effective justifications for validating the system's existence and growing it to be as large, powerful, and prestigious as possible. Anyone in the system who wants to accumulate any personal prestige or benefit (which is basically everyone) must therefore loyally adhere to, uphold, and defend the dominant narrative at all times, or be severely disadvantaged.

A managerial regime is a system of systems. Each has a local narrative validating its own particular existence and importance, but these narratives are nested in higher narratives. A teachers union has a narrative about itself, but that is nested in a higher narrative about the importance of managerial mass education. At the top is an ur-narrative, justifying and uniting the whole edifice. In our case that is managerialism itself: the need for managers to manage all things. All those within the system of systems (the managerial regime) seeking prestige and advancement must therefore effectively subscribe to all these narratives, including the same ur-narrative. Echoing the values and stories of the dominant narrative then serves as an indicator of belonging to system, class, and shared righteous identity.

Hence anyone in the professional managerial class who wants to become or remain a member of the managerial elite will almost inevitably conform to and parrot the same broad narrative belief structure, even if they are in completely different institutions and professions. Frank the FBI agent and Joanna the journalist are programmed to each react the same way to the same narrative stimulus, repeat the same slogans, and engage in the same required "not noticings" of reality, simply because each wants to avoid being shunned and to advance in status within the prestige hierarchy of their respective organizations. There is no direct coordination needed to get them to do this.

The same goes for whole institutions as well: those seeking to confirm their prestige within the managerial regime will all conform to the same narrative. Hence elite institutions like Harvard and *The New York Times* maintain and advance essentially identical beliefs. Meanwhile lower status universities or newspapers will try to act as much like them (the prestigious ideal) as possible, and so tout the same narrative with even more devotion than they do. (It of course also helps that these institutions all draw from the same oligarchic class of people – the same informal party, one could say – all inculcated into the same systems and

narrative worldviews from birth, going to the same schools, living in the same zip codes, consuming the same media and culture, and so on.)

Why did Wokeism seem to take over every elite institution at once? Primarily because it was a dominant narrative innovation that justified making the managerial elite and the whole managerial system larger, more powerful, higher status, and of more central importance to society. *Of course* very few individuals in these institutions were ever going to stand against it.

Narrative coordination's impact is also enhanced by the fact that, a bit like the CCP, the managerial "party" has already achieved an extensive level of penetration throughout every corner of society. Any concentration of a sufficient number professional managerial class members – an HR department, DEI office, or communications staff, for example – can begin to function as a de facto "party cell," serving as a ready-made surveillance and reporting mechanism, propaganda channel, and internal pressure group. This is the case no matter how deep into "hostile" geographic/class territory that they otherwise are. Since any sufficiently large organization ends up having to recruit these managerially educated people in order to operate, basically no institution, not even say a mostly working-class energy company in Texas, a Christian school in Alabama, or a military academy in Virginia, will be spared from steadily accumulating its own group of agitators dedicated to pushing it to adopt elite-favored managerial policies, practices, and values. (Thus it can be expected that any organization not explicitly anti-managerial will sooner or later become managerial.) If all of these cells can be united by narrative to act in the same direction, they can make for a tremendously powerful force for national-level change (as we've seen since 2020).

How different then is this narrative coordination mechanism from the role that ideology plays in a party-state like China? It's really not. An ideology is just a narrative that's been written down and codified. But an ideology that's been mainly left as free-floating narrative in the cloud, so to speak, may in fact be even more all-encompassing and influential, precisely because it is more flexible and able to constantly update itself in a power-maximizing direction. This has perhaps been a real advantage for soft managerial systems over their more openly and rigidly ideological hard siblings.

So, to recap: in this conception, if there is a united front in the West it is not an explicit network of actors deliberately working together, but instead a unity formed out of conformity to narrative. It functions as a kind of swarm intelligence (or egregore), rather than operating through any central or top-down control. This can explain why soft managerial institutions all move almost completely in sync with each other, and have for some time.

But, hold up… this doesn't quite match the reality of what we've seen develop in the West in recent years, including most obviously in the hulking form of the Censorship-Industrial Complex. As revealed by the intrepid investigative reporting of journalists like Matt Taibbi , Michael Shellenberger of Public, Lee Fang , and many others, the Complex is a network of managerial institutions that *have* directly coordinated with each other in order to censor political opposition and manipulate the public.

In their own words, technology platform companies like Twitter, Facebook, and Google engaged in extensive "collaboration" with "partners" from across the federal government – including the Pentagon, State Department, intelligence agencies, and public health bureaucracies – as well as for-profit defense contractors, NGOs, universities, think tanks, media outlets, and the Democratic Party in order to erase or limit the reach of information detrimental to their interests. Twitter executives described the company's relationship with the FBI, for example, as a "tight, well-coordinated partnership." This network set up what it literally called a "Virtual Coordination Center" to manage information operations across dozens of institutions during the 2020 election (and it wasn't disbanded afterwards). Thousands of pages of emails and records of hundreds of hours of meetings testify to constant direct instructions by the state for the tech companies to censor public speech. The White House is on record having repeatedly sent lists of individual accounts that they demanded be "kicked off" social media, such as those of critical journalists like Alex Berenson. Officials often used language directly leveraging their authority, such as claiming that "the highest (and I mean the highest) levels" of the administration demanded action, or – upon discovering the existence of parody accounts mocking Hunter Biden – that they could not "stress the degree to which this needs to be resolved immediately" (as with others like it, this request was "resolved" within 45 minutes). Moreover, this network is transnational. Even foreign governments, including the EU and Ukraine's intelligence service, the SBU, have successfully colluded with the tech companies to limit speech by American (and other countries') citizens. Little wonder then that, in a detailed 155-page ruling, one federal judge recently described this "almost dystopian" scheme as plausibly "the most massive attack against free speech in United States' history."
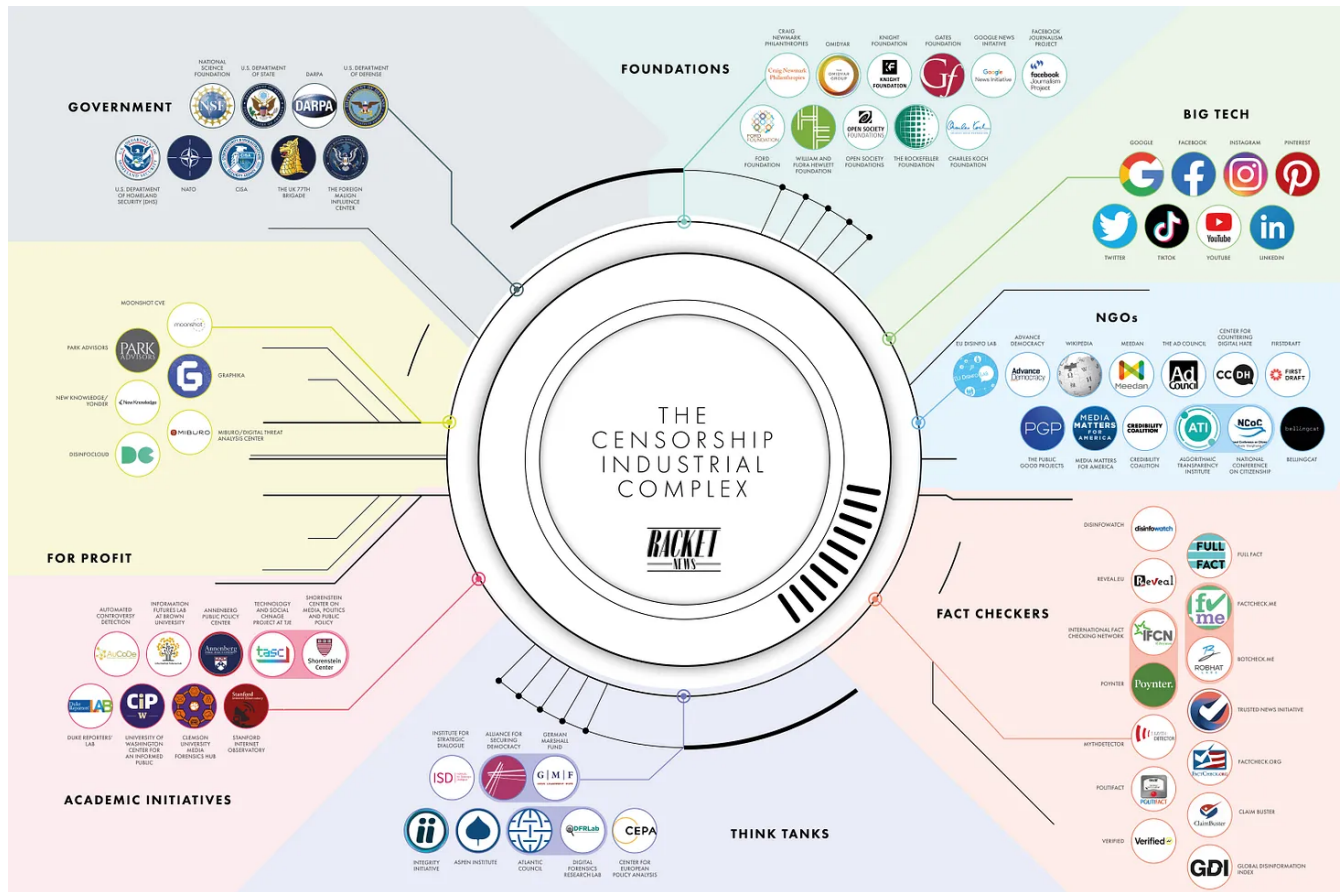
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Even the limited [glimpse of the iceberg](#) we've been afforded so far reveals a vast operational cartel of public and private managerial organizations that, in its direct coordination, far more closely resembles the CCP's united front network than whatever more vague agglomeration based on shared interests and narratives may have existed in the past.

As Jacob Siegel astutely notes in his [deep dive](#) into the development of the Censorship-Industrial Complex, "countering disinformation" (the Western euphemism for "political security") has since 2016 been regularly described as requiring the development of a "whole of society" strategy. "Only a whole-of-society approach – one that engages government, private companies and civil society alike – can effectively combat and build resilience to disinformation," is how FBI Director Christopher Wray [put it](#) in 2020. Such an approach has, he said, become "central to how we work with both the public and private sectors, from other government agencies, to companies of all sizes, to universities, to NGOs." Indeed the "whole of society" framing can now [be found](#) [in use](#) [just about](#) [everywhere](#) [you look](#) [across](#) [the](#) [Western world](#), serving as an excuse for directly fusing state power with a single extensive and unified international network of managerial technocrats, effectively circumventing and shielding it from any democratic control whatsoever.

It sure seems, in fact, like the revolt of the elites has produced not just a more self-conscious and defensive oligarchic network, but has prompted its hardening into something that's beginning to look an awful lot like the singular party of a party-state. As a result, narrative coordination mechanism seems to have begun to evolve and crystalize into something more: an actively enforced *party line*.

In a Leninist system like China the "party line" is the "truth" that everyone must hold, or else. The party line is constantly shifting, based on the needs of the party center, and it is the crucial task of the average person to constantly intuit precisely where the line is at any given moment without being told, and to nimbly readjust their stated beliefs to match. An instinctive ability to do so is what Isaiah Berlin, observing communist Russia, once called "the most precious knack" any citizen of such a regime could acquire. An inability to master this art could be fatal for even the most devoted cadre. Even holding too zealously to yesterday's sacred truth could be a disastrous mistake. But Berlin noted that while, "Inability to predict curious movements of the line is a crucial failure in a communist," it always remained the case that "nobody can feel certain of the password from day to day."

This is deliberate. In such a system keeping up with the party line – or maintaining what in Russia after the revolution of 1917 came to be known as "political correctness" – is itself the true test of an individual's reliability and loyalty to the regime.[19] As a result, most people begin to no longer speak unless they can be sure they are expressing the correct views, utilizing careful ambiguity and avoiding "dangerous" topics altogether. Society then inevitably experiences a conquest by what under communism has been called "wooden language" ("*la langue de bois*"), or what Orwell satirized as "Newspeak": a sort of incomprehensible zombie dialect that is simultaneously dead, saying nothing real, yet able to be contorted to mean whatever it needs to mean whenever it needs to mean it. CCP officials and other undead reliably master this language.

A party line is ideological in content, but it is not really an ideology. It changes by the day, and is ultimately empty and cynical. It is like a coordinating narrative as described above; but, unlike such a narrative, which is largely unconscious in its influence, everyone is quite conscious of the party line's dominance. If a narrative is mostly seductive, a party line is maintained at least as much by force of terror; it is an expression of power, an enforced conformity. And while a narrative mostly applies only to its in-group, a party line forces itself on everyone, including its enemies, and demands obedience. It is characteristically totalitarian.

Why might the West's more amorphous narrative have now hardened into a stricter party line? Well, it should be pointed out that a dominant narrative has no inherent incentive to keep it connected to reality. If the narrative is a discourse, it is in discourse only with itself. It is a closed, self-reinforcing feedback loop that rewards every new justification for growth in power and scope, no matter if that justification has any basis in truth, while punishing any threat of limitation. So in fact it has every incentive to eventually achieve takeoff velocity and leave all earthly reality behind. Those who insist on trying to reassert reality then become a threat to its growth. Protecting the narrative from reality becomes a core job of the narrative's systems.

The more unnatural (detached from reality) a system is, the more force is needed to impose it. The more the narrative is challenged the more fiercely defended it is by those possessed by it, and the more they find the use of coercive power justified in doing so. "Noble" lies, at the very least, quickly become permissible in defense of the greater "truth" of the system – at which point those at the top of the system begin to tweak and manipulate the propagated narrative itself in an effort to defend it from its enemies. Simultaneously, a small core portion of those who have made it to the top are, unsurprisingly, psychopaths. For them the truth of the narrative was never important, only power, so they are happy to take more direct control of the narrative if they can. But since the narrative is in a sense itself psychopathic, given its power-maximizing nature, they form a sort of symbiotic relationship to grow together. Either way, for cynic and true believer alike, the narrative becomes, naturally, something to be *managed.*

Combine this with an extreme center rapidly growing more paranoid about threats to its legitimacy and control, and more determined to respond with a managerial united front, and we get a party line. Through it, the singular unreality of a one-party state is to be forced on everyone. While the success of this prospect may sound unrealistic, the party seems to be in luck: new technologies offer it tantalizing hope that the total administration of reality can indeed soon be achieved, and narrative harmony restored.

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Reality Management

Pondering the Censorship-Industrial Complex, Matt Taibbi remarked [in a July 2023 podcast](#) with the writer **Walter Kirn** that all the assorted "experts" involved have, by "devising digital mechanisms by which they can turn down the volume on different ideas" on the

internet – through tools like "deamplification" (shadow banning), search manipulation, and the selective addition of "friction" (such as spurious content warnings) – in effect appointed themselves as "unelected masters of the universe messing around with reality itself."

Kirn then followed up with an evocative metaphor:

> They're mixing a record, Matt. They're sitting there at a soundboard mixing a record. A little more cowbell. Let's bring down the bass. Let's bring up the treble, and they use words like friction and other mechanical metaphors for what they do to actual people. And we're all just kind of bytes and digits in this musical production they call society. And it does sound crazy because it sounds so arrogant, so effortlessly arrogant as though social processes are computer processes and as though the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of a society are different instruments in a recording studio to be brought up in intensity or pushed out.

This is a particularly apt description of how managerialism is bound to approach collective reality: as if it were something to be fine-tuned through expertise. "What kind of society, what kind of economy, what kind of culture are we looking at if this goes on unchecked?" Kirn wonders. "We're talking about thoughts never reaching visibility and a kind of power that probably didn't exist before."

We're likely to find out. As Siegel points out in the conclusion to his [essay](#), already at this point, "The first great battles of the information war are over." The clumsy initial forays by the Censorship-Industrial Complex have been "waged by a class of journalists, retired generals, spies, Democratic Party bosses, party apparatchiks, and counterterrorism experts against the remnant of the American people who refused to submit to their authority." But it is obvious that this means of mass censorship, "which requires considerable human labor and leaves behind plenty of evidence," is already being replaced by far more sophisticated technological methods of control. "Future battles fought through AI technologies," Siegel warns, "will be harder to see."

Artificial intelligence and other advances may allow for a far more precisely and comprehensively controlled information environment. The result could be a world in which automated censors are capable not only of instantaneously detecting and removing content disagreeable to the regime, but are able to completely filter and shape all of the information that reaches any person through the internet. Search results could be manipulated, inconvenient facts and data made simply undiscoverable. Definitions, official records,

databases, and digital textbooks or even literature could be altered on the fly to match the party line. Disagreeable opinions and news could be algorithmically suppressed or made entirely unsharable, with seekers seamlessly rerouted to propaganda. Even large-scale real-world events, like a major pro-democracy protest, could be effectively disappeared, as if they had never happened, or immediately re-framed through selective editing to depict a chosen propaganda narrative. Personal digital IDs (whether officially mandated or simply informally assembled for each individual through big data collection) would allow consistently customized messaging and incentive "nudges" to be pushed to each person.

Of course, all of this is already happening. Social media companies already algorithmically filter information, secretly implement "search blacklists," prevent certain topics from trending, and selectively disable links. These methods are already [used for explicitly political purposes](). Google has already been caught regularly manipulating search results (e.g. [hiding search results]() for the lockdown-skeptical Great Barrington Declaration and only showing users results of opinions criticizing it, as verified by documents reviewed in the *Missouri v. Biden* [case]()). Dictionaries already [redefine]() the official [meaning]() of words [in near real time]() as the party line shifts. Government bodies and their media [do the same thing](). News outlets regularly make stealth edits; whole scandals are memory-holed. Today even [entire novels are rewritten]() without the author's consent, [or even awareness](), to make sure they conform. (A [whole industry of "sensitivity readers"]() now exists to give publications a good pre-scrubbing in a doubtless futile effort to avoid having to do this later.) Google software already "assists" users by automatically prompting them to [change politically incorrect words]() and phrases as they're writing them.

But these may be just the first stumbling baby steps towards what with further developments in AI could become an all-encompassing regime of algorithmic gaslighting and fully-automated narrative management. The true force of totalitarian regimes, Hannah Arendt once reflected, was that, even "before the movement has the power to drop the iron curtains to prevent anyone from disturbing, by the slightest reality, the gruesome quiet of an entirely imaginary world," their propaganda machines possessed the "ability to shut the masses off from the real world." Today, much as virtual reality devices now already allow for "augmented reality" (the addition of the virtual superimposed onto perception of reality), a vast reality distortion field threatens to settle itself in between the public and the true world.

The managerial regime is of course already engaged in a furious crash construction effort to build such a reality-distortion machine by integrating AI into its existing obsession with information control. Internet and social media companies have begun initiatives aimed at

"prebunking" information, or what former State Department official Mike Benz describes as "a form of narrative censorship integrated into social media algorithms to stop citizens from forming specific social and political belief systems," and [compares](#) to attempting to police "pre-crime." Following [a call by Bill Gates](#) to use AI to suppress "conspiracy theories" and "political polarization," Google will for example [seek](#) on behalf of the German government "to make people more resilient to the corrosive effects of online misinformation." In the United States, the Department of Defense has awarded tens of millions of dollars to contractors promising to further automate "defenses" against "disinformation," while the National Science Foundation has launched a "Convergence Accelerator" (yes, really) to incubate technologies designed to monitor and counter such heresies as "vaccine hesitancy and electoral skepticism."

Meanwhile, [in the imminent future](#) asking something of a search engine like Google will not prompt it to display discrete search results at all. Instead an AI chatbot will instantly tell you everything it thinks you need to know in response. This appears set to become the norm just about everywhere the human interfaces with the digital. But of course such an AI will not be speaking the full truth, only the narrative determined by [the cadre in the code](#). We already know that ChatGPT, for example, isn't merely [biased and ideological](#); rather, as the mathematician and writer Brian Chau [has pointed out](#), explicit policies by its creator OpenAI mean that the structure of its code already goes "as far as prohibiting the chatbot from communicating politically inconvenient facts [at all], even ones agreed upon in the scientific community." It is literally built to be incapable of accurately describing reality. Its vocation is instead to quickly regurgitate the correct party line. ("Fact: Oceania has always been at war with Eurasia.") But how many people will simply take what they are told by such an AI at face value? No doubt the great managerial hope is that, eventually, as the technology conditions people to become ever lazier and less self-reliant, the answer will someday be just about everyone.

Prominent venture capitalist and technologist Marc Andreessen [predicts](#) that rapidly accelerating advances in AI large language models like ChatGPT mean that we will soon live in a world where, "Every child will have an AI tutor that is infinitely patient, infinitely compassionate, infinitely knowledgeable, infinitely helpful." In fact everyone will have an equally wonderful "AI assistant/coach/mentor/trainer/advisor/therapist" perched at their ear at all times to tell them what to believe. The New Man of this particular amazing utopia wouldn't even have to bother to think or remember anything for himself at all! All his information would be conveniently blended up and spoon-fed to him by an immense and

tutelary AI through his cognitive infrastructure, surely to be cared for by the state. Should such a future really come to pass, I suspect that it would no doubt be a world where nothing exists except an endless present in which the party is always right.

This would represent the greatest possible triumph for soft managerialism: a system in which all potential resistance from the masses is completely contained by pure narrative manipulation, with no need for coercion or the open use of force to ever be used at all. It's no surprise then that developing this kind of innovative narrative control is one area where the West is in fact leading the way, while China, with its sweeping but relatively ham-fisted censorship and uninspired propaganda apparatus, is now scrambling to catch up and develop similarly sophisticated discourse power.

Still, reality being as stubborn as it is, narrative management alone is unlikely to ever be completely sufficient to enforce universal compliance with the party line. Other, more coercive methods will in the end inevitably be needed to deal with dissent. And here it's China that leads the way for the world.

Enjoy the Fengqiao Experience! – Governance by Mass Line Social Control

Xi Jinping and his officials like to muse wistfully about the pleasures of the "Fengqiao experience" (枫桥经验) and sharing them with all of China. Fengqiao ("Maple Bridge") is, or was, a picturesque little township in Zhejiang province, but I'm afraid the Fengqiao experience is not a tourism package. Rather, back in the 1960s Fengqiao distinguished itself as a model town in the eyes of Mao. While usually Party thugs had to go around identifying and rounding up "reactionary elements," in Fengqiao the people handled it themselves: "not one person [had to be] rounded up, and still the vast majority of enemies were dealt with." Brilliant!

Fengqiao so impressed Mao because, by constantly monitoring and snitching on each other, and engaging in "on-site rectification" (mob struggle sessions) and "rehabilitation" (thought reform) to collectively enforce conformity, the people there successfully policed themselves without being told. Here at last was a true example of the "dictatorship of the masses" that Mao hoped to establish. With sufficient mobilization by the Party's leadership, the "mass line" of the public could successfully exert immense social control over itself on the Party's behalf. Mao encouraged the party to learn from the experience of Fengqiao, and in doing so planted a seed that would take root and grow in the hard soil of the CCP imagination: a

dream of a population so thoroughly conditioned by Chinese socialism that someday it would practically manage itself.

Today Xi has revitalized and modernized this idea by marrying it to newly available tools: those of the digital revolution. With exhortations of "mass prevention and mass governance," "digital justice for the masses," and "grid-style management," traditional methods of Fengqiao-style social mass monitoring and control (such as organized teams of informants, tip lines, public "call outs" and social shaming) have been combined with internet-wide mobilization and a vast digital surveillance apparatus.[20] That now includes big data analytics integrating universal real time biometric, location, and financial purchase tracking (including through the ubiquitous "everything app" WeChat), along with internet and social media history and interpersonal relationship mapping.

The jewel in the crown of this approach is intended to be China's social credit system. Made possible by algorithmic processing and the reams of data collected on every individual, the system (which is still in the process of being developed, piloted, and implemented) intends to assign each person – as well as each company or organization – a unique aggregated "social credit" score. This is much like a financial credit score: based on observed behavior and other "risk factors," the score can be adjusted up or down to designate an individual or business as more or less "trustworthy" or "untrustworthy." In the trials conducted so far, those with higher scores are rewarded with escalating perks, such as priority access to travel, loans, housing, higher education, or even healthcare. Those with lower scores face escalating punishments, such as losing access to the financial system, prohibition from buying luxury goods, airplane or high-speed rail tickets, or real estate, as well as denial of admission for themselves or their children to certain schools and universities. Billed as a benign means of increasing the overall level of "trust" in society, the stated goal of the system is to "allow the trustworthy to roam everywhere under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step."

Points can be gained by doing good deeds like volunteering, or amplifying government propaganda. Companies can donate to GONGO charities and comply with corporate social responsibility schemes. Points are lost through bad behavior, such as littering, not promptly paying bills and fines, traffic violations, jaywalking, causing a public "disturbance," or spreading harmful "misinformation" on the internet (especially about the regime). Most recently, environmental regulation has begun to be integrated with the credit system, with "un-green" behaviors factored into scores.

THE GAME OF LIFE

China's social credit system expands the idea of a standard credit check to all aspects of life. **Each citizen is assigned 1000 points,** constantly monitored to judge their behavior, and rated accordingly.

Citizens gain points by:
- Donating blood or money
- Engaging in charity work
- Praising the government on social media
- Helping the poor

Citizens lose points by:
- Not visiting one's aging parents regularly
- Insincere apologies for crimes committed
- Cheating in online games
- Spreading rumors on the internet

REWARDS INCLUDE:
- Fast-tracking a work promotion
- Priority status for children's school admissions
- Easier access to bank loans and consumer credit
- Tax breaks

PUNISHMENTS INCLUDE:
- Exclusion from booking flights or train tickets
- Ineligibility for certain jobs
- Restricted access to public services
- Public shaming on TV and via social media

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung

REVIVAL OF THE DANG'AN?

The **dang'an** (English: *record*) was a paper file used by the Chinese government, containing the following documents:

档案
DANG'AN

- Photographs
- Employment records
- School reports
- Information on physical characteristics

The social credit system can be seen as **the digital dang'an**—gathering citizen data mirrors this principle that has been used since China's Maoist era.

The file was created when a child started elementary school, and was updated throughout their lifetime.

Importantly, the system is deliberately social in nature. Those with low scores are publicly listed and shamed online or on public billboards; even some dating apps have trialed incorporating social credit scores. Most significantly, because having too many relationships with people who have low scores risks lowering one's own score, people have an incentive to avoid associating with the "discredited" at all, accelerating their progressive unpersoning by society.

Though the social credit system is still under construction and not yet fully implemented (a reason seized on by a surprising number of apologists in the West to downplay or dismiss its existence entirely), the totalitarian thrust of the idea is absolutely clear, and has been since plans for it were first laid in 2014. Its purpose is to universalize the Fengqiao experience, or what is alternatively identified by the Party as "social governance." As a report by the

Canadian Security Intelligence Service aptly [puts it](#): "Social governance describes a system that is self-managing – one that can automatically adjust itself to help the Party consolidate and expand power."

In this context, the report notes, "The function of social credit in the CCP's management methodology is to automate 'individual responsibility', a concept according to which each citizen upholds social stability and national security." In other words, the social credit system aims to use comprehensive immersion in an inescapable system of constant positive and negative reinforcement – mixing rewards and punishments, subtly tweaked as needed, as if making adjustments on a soundboard – to completely condition its citizens. Or, one might say, it effectively "covers the surface of society with a network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate." The goal of this gamification of the mind is, as usual, to create a New Man to fit into the managerial machine. We do not need to speculate that this is the intention; it is always and everywhere the inexorable object of managerialism ("Psychoanalysis carried in it the promise that it can be done…").

This social engineering has already been effective. I vividly recall, for example, how visiting China even as late as the 2000s or mid-2010s, absolutely everyone used to jaywalk all the time. [21] It was simply a fact of life, a cultural constant seemingly ingrained by who knew how many centuries of the Chinese peasantry's wonderfully incorrigible pragmatism and total unwillingness to submit to waiting in any manner of line. Today nobody jaywalks (at least in the city), because, if you do, your identity is captured by facial recognition camera, your face, name, and ID number are plastered on a billboard of shame next to the intersection, and a fine is sent to your bank. All those centuries of evolved cultural attitude have been successfully overwritten by only a few years of conditioning by [the machine](#).

A billboard in China displays the face, name, and ID number of a jaywalker.

In the West, eager eyes are watching, and learning.

In June, the British bank Coutts closed the account of right-wing politician Nigel Farage without explanation. Farage was subsequently refused service by ten other banks. Internal "risk" documents produced by the bank and obtained by Farage soon showed Coutt's reasoning for "exiting" him from his account: Farage had been found to no longer be "compatible with Coutts given his publicly-stated views that were at odds with our position as an inclusive organization." The terrible sins listed on Farage's rap sheet included: being friends with Donald Trump and unvaccinated tennis champion Novak Djokovic; campaigning for Brexit; using the word "globalist" with a negative connotation; being "climate denying/anti-net zero"; being "seen as xenophobic and racist"; and having been a "fascist" when he was a schoolboy, according to some rumors once heard by someone said to be in the know. Together this evidence proved Farage was "increasingly out of touch with wider society" (i.e. progress) and thus presented an "ongoing reputational risk to the bank." So, especially "when considering our stance specifically on ESG/diversity," he had to go.

In this case, having been caught red-handed "debanking" a prominent and savvy politician for political reasons, the bank was ultimately forced to apologize and some of its top officials to resign. Such consequences are an exception to the rule, however. Politically motivated debanking has in recent years become increasingly routine practice across the West.

Most memorably, Justin Trudeau's Canadian government invoked emergency powers to freeze the bank accounts and seize the assets of the truckers protesting his destructive vaccine mandates and demagoguery. Canadians who had merely donated money to support the truckers also had their accounts frozen. This tactic of using financial levers to personally destroy political dissidents and shut down protests has since quickly spread around the world, also being used against protesting truckers in Brazil, for instance.

Debanking initiated by the banks themselves appears to have become even more common, however. In the same month as Farage, for example, the UK's Rev. Richard Fothergill had his account closed on the spot after offering mild disagreement with his bank's relentless promotion of transgender ideology on a customer feedback survey (the bank told him this view was "not tolerable"). Also in the same month, Scottish anti-Woke blogger Stuart Campbell had his account of 25 years closed by the bank First Direct without his even being notified. He only discovered the fact upon suddenly finding himself unable to use his card to buy groceries. In the US, mere days after the Farage scandal, JP Morgan Chase shuttered the bank accounts of anti-vaccine proponent Dr. Joseph Mercola, as well as his business' CEO, CFO, their spouses, and all of their children. Again, these are all examples from within just a single month. And such cases that manage to draw public attention are doubtless only the tip of the iceberg. Farage says he has begun assembling a "very large database" of potentially thousands of similar cases from the UK alone.

Nor are banks the only ones involved. Online payment platforms have joined in too. GoFundMe seized money donated to the Canadian truckers through its platform on its own initiative. In May, **Konstantin Kisin**'s popular anti-Woke *Triggernometry* podcast was deplatformed by fintech company Tide. PayPal, in one of the more symbolic instances of its especially prolific debanking habit, cut off the Free Speech Union for promoting "intolerance." PayPal also famously attempted to slip language into its user agreement allowing it to confiscate $2,500 from users each time they spread "misinformation" or said or did anything "harmful" or "objectionable" (all defined at PayPal's "sole discretion").

Why is this happening? Why would private banks and other businesses force out paying customers like this and risk courting public backlash? Because it is in their interest to do so if

they want to survive and thrive, and indeed they have little choice. These banks are not really fully "private actors," as they are part of the managerial economy in a budding managerial party-state. The business of a managerial business is not business; it's managerialism. And once more: *there can be no neutral institutions in a party-state*. The party-state's enemies are the institution's enemies, or the institution is an enemy of the party-state (which is not a profitable position to be in). This is what "reputational risk" means: the risk of appearing to be on the wrong side of the party line. Hence why we find Coutts, a bank founded in 1692 and so quintessentially posh establishment that it banks the British Royal Family, [decking out its entire headquarters](#) in the rainbow regalia of loyalty and operating like it too is, like the AIIB, controlled by "an internal secret police."

So, at the present moment, when the managerial system is defending itself against challenges from its anti-managerial "populist" enemies, the banks will automatically find themselves participating in the war effort. And the banks are on the frontlines of that war, because financial control is the obvious next evolution for a hardening soft managerial system seeking new methods of stability maintenance beyond the usual practice of narrative control. In a digitized society, financial control is now, like narrative manipulation, entirely a matter of controlling virtual information. That makes it a natural and familiar feeling tool [for foxes](#) who prefer suppressing dissent from a laptop. No need to get the hands dirty when your weapon is a keyboard.

Most importantly, in a society as digitized as ours, control over digital transactions means surveillance and control over nearly everything. When someone is debanked – and then inevitably blacklisted from all other banks, because the banks are networked and share "risk" information – they are cut off from participation in nearly every aspect of modern life. They will have no easy way to receive pay from a job, as cashing checks without an account incurs exorbitant fees, and they may even simply be fired to avoid inconvenience (US federal law permits companies to make direct deposit mandatory). If they own a business, they will be left with no way to process the vast majority of payments, and won't have any functional means to distribute payroll to employees. They will even be cut off from the primary medium for soliciting any donations beyond loose change. They cannot buy property and, in the case of many property management companies, may not even be able to rent. They will be unable to purchase almost any digital service and, increasingly, will be prevented from completing many everyday offline transactions as well. Once the ongoing [war on cash](#) is won, they will be well and truly screwed.

Debanking, especially when combined with similar forms of commercial deplatforming from other digital services, such as internet service providers, domain registrars, e-commerce platforms like Amazon, or app stores like Apple's, therefore serves as an extremely effective means to isolate and silence a targeted person or group, quickly breaking any presence and influence they may have once had within society. Which is of course the point.

This appears to be a lesson taken directly from the Chinese method of dealing with dissidents. Having been subjected to similar means of unpersoning for years, the advent of "digital authoritarianism" has made such dissidents even more vulnerable to constant coercion, their destruction serving as a powerful incentive against crossing the party line. Now the social credit system has allowed a flexible and convenient means to apply that kind of coercion at scale. Utopia is doubtless just around the corner.

Having dipped a few of their mandibles in to test the waters with other lessons from China, the West's managerial elite seem to have concluded that they now have the tools and latitude to begin implementing a similar system here. Although not yet anywhere near as comprehensive, this nascent system shares the same fundamental characteristics: using public-private coordination and "social governance" to collapse any distinction between public and private life, thereby greatly raising the risks for public non-conformity and dissent from the narrative.

In fact we can see transparent steps towards the construction of a social credit system in the now widespread use of such innovations as ESG (environmental, social, and governance) scores. Such scores, which major financial institutions wield to make vocal conformity to specific social and ideological practices a requirement for businesses to access capital, operate on the same principles of public-private collapse. Similar NGO-led scoring schemes such as the [Corporate Equality Index](#) and UK-based [Diversity Champions](#) program have also emerged and achieved outsized levels of influence by wielding the scores as, essentially, extortion operations threatening those businesses that fail to conform with "reputational risk" blackmail and deplatforming. Such businesses then find that in order to maintain their scores they must manage the conformity of customers as well (as Coutts's documents admitted explicitly when citing "our stance specifically on ESG/diversity" as reason Farage had to be debanked).

How far might this all go? While the powerful realm of financial flows is today's focus, there is no reason to think that, on the current trajectory, the same dynamics won't be applied, in a united front, to every other sector of our economy and society. If someday soon people find

themselves evicted from their insurance policies for speaking out of turn online (or associating with too many people who do), apartment leases come with ideological morality clauses, and airlines unite to ban customers with the wrong beliefs from traveling, we shouldn't be surprised – this will simply be the behavior of a hardening managerialism seeking stability through mechanistic control over all the details of life.

New technologies, like AI and, especially, central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) will only continue to make this kind of granular control more and more possible.[22] And all that which can possibly be used will be used. A few months ago, a man found himself completely shut out of his digitally controlled "smart home" by Amazon after a delivery driver accused his doorbell of saying something racist.[23] Why would Amazon bother to do this? Because they can do this; and so, in the end, under a managerial regime, they must do this. As our managers find that every day it feels easier and easier to "solve" problematic people with the click of a button, they will not be able to resist hitting that button, hard and often.

Such is the very *weltanschauung* – the whole way of seeing and believing – of the managerial mind. As more and more comes within the technological grasp of the managerial machine, its grip will only continue to tighten. For as we should see clearly by now, there "neither is nor can be any simple increase of power on Man's side" produced by technology. Inevitably, "Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well."

The end of the road for the great convergence of managerialisms appears to lie under the shadow of digital totalitarianism.
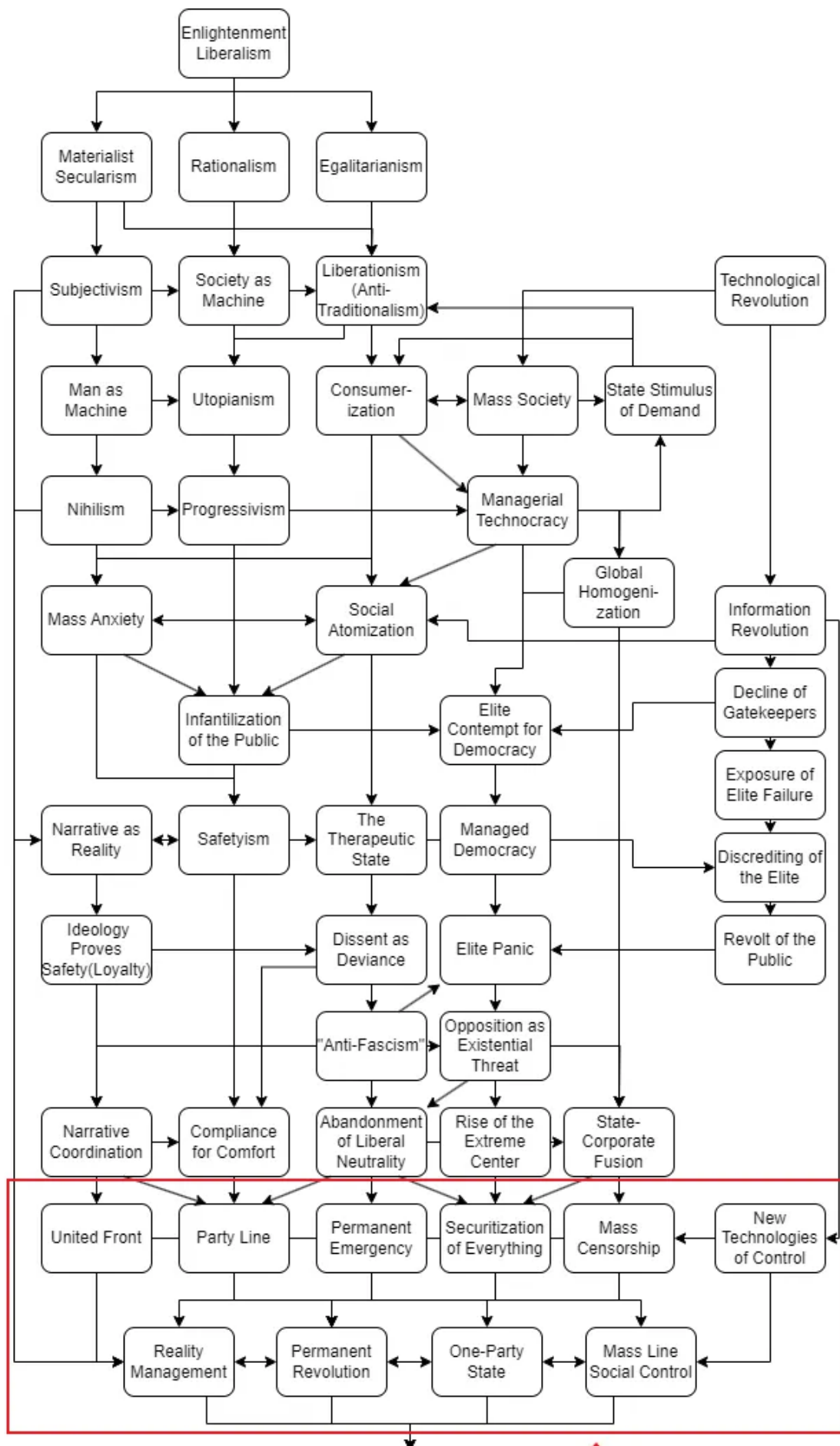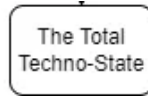
Conclusion: The Total Techno-State

James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution* had a big influence on one author in particular. Reflecting on the book in 1945, George Orwell lamented that Burnham's "picture of the new world has turned out to be correct." In this new world:

> Capitalism is disappearing, but Socialism is not replacing it. What is now arising is a new kind of planned, centralized society which will be neither capitalist nor, in any accepted sense of the word, democratic. The rulers of this new society will be the people who effectively control the means of production: that is, business executives, technicians, bureaucrats and soldiers, lumped together by Burnham under the name of 'managers'. These people will eliminate the old capitalist class, crush the working class, and so organize society that all power and economic privilege remain in their own hands. Private property rights will be abolished, but common ownership will not be established. The new

> 'managerial' societies will not consist of a patchwork of small, independent states, but of great super-states grouped round the main industrial centres in Europe, Asia, and America. These super-states will fight among themselves for possession of the remaining uncaptured portions of the earth, but will probably be unable to conquer one another completely. Internally, each society will be hierarchical, with an aristocracy of talent at the top and a mass of semi-slaves at the bottom.

This vision of a world beset by managerial convergence would become the basis for Orwell's most famous novel, *1984.* Now that world is taking shape.

Enlightenment Liberalism

Materialist Secularism — Rationalism — Egalitarianism

Subjectivism — Society as Machine — Liberationism (Anti-Traditionalism) — Technological Revolution

Man as Machine — Utopianism — Consumer-ization — Mass Society — State Stimulus of Demand

Nihilism — Progressivism — Managerial Technocracy

Global Homogeni-zation — Information Revolution

Mass Anxiety — Social Atomization — Elite Contempt for Democracy — Decline of Gatekeepers

Infantilization of the Public — Exposure of Elite Failure

Narrative as Reality — Safetyism — The Therapeutic State — Managed Democracy — Discrediting of the Elite

Ideology Proves Safety (Loyalty) — Dissent as Deviance — Elite Panic — Revolt of the Public

"Anti-Fascism" — Opposition as Existential Threat

Narrative Coordination — Compliance for Comfort — Abandonment of Liberal Neutrality — Rise of the Extreme Center — State-Corporate Fusion

United Front — Party Line — Permanent Emergency — Securitization of Everything — Mass Censorship — New Technologies of Control

Reality Management — Permanent Revolution — One-Party State — Mass Line Social Control

Use this simple, handy summary chart to see where it all went so, so wrong for your society.

Today the great super-states struggle for possession of the earth. But for all past speculation that the 21st century would be defined by a "clash of civilizations," today there is only one, smothering form of modern civilization that has stretched itself across the face of the globe, its multiple personalities vying amongst themselves for imperial supremacy. In the West, progressive managerialism softly strangled democracy to death over a century of manipulation, hollowed it out, and now wears its skin. In the East, the imported virus of communist managerialism wiped out a once-great civilization in a river of blood, then crystalized into the cold, hard machine that now rules the lands of China. Fascist managerialism, killed off by its fratricidal siblings, lives on in their genes.

Managerialism has today conquered the world so thoroughly that to most of us it may seem like the only possible universe, the very water in which we swim. With our history rewritten and our minds conditioned, just as Orwell (and other prophets) predicted, we now struggle even to perceive its existence, yet alone to break through the iron paradigm of managerial thinking and recognize that, as both a form of government and a way of being, it is in the human experience something wholly new, abnormal, tyrannical, and absurd.

Birthed from the core conceits of modernity, the grotesque pathology of managerialism is defined by its boundless hubris and relentless reductionism. Viewing nature, Man, and society all as raw material that through pure imagination and technical skill it can break down and reconfigure as it pleases, this leviathan comes, in its pride, to believe that even reality must bend to its will. It is, in the ultimate narcissistic ambition of its idiot rationalism, inherently totalitarian. Indeed the "total" in totalitarian is the very essence of managerialism at its deepest level, and the two cannot be disaggregated. And so managerialism always promises human progress and perfection but then inevitably delivers inhumanity on an industrial scale.

The 20th century ended up being defined by the catastrophic upheaval and destruction that the first great wave of managerial totalitarianism inflicted on the world. The hydra of that totalitarian scourge, in its multiple visages, was amid that struggle wounded but never slain. Now the 21st century is being shaken by the upheaval of its resurgence.

Sharing the same managerial hubris, tempted by the same growing technological powers and desire to engineer the mind and soul of Man, sheltering the same elite insecurities and delusions, and [seeking to head off many of the same challenges](#), China and the West are today both leading the charge for that resurgence from different directions. Even as they roil and clash, each – hard and soft, modernist and post-modernist – is in its own way converging on the same destiny: the same socially engineered submission of everything human, real, and free to technocratic nihilism and the false reality of an all-encompassing machine-government – to a total techno-state.

It's in my view now clear that humanity's great task of the 21st century remains fundamentally the same as that left unfinished in the battles of the 20th: to reawaken and reassert the flame of the human spirt and reclaim its tradition of and natural right to self-governance. And then with that spirit, wielding the fire and sword of true human love and freedom, truth and right reason, to rise up in counter-revolution against the evil of its archenemy and tear the false order of managerialism and all its poisonous ideological spawn root and branch from the world forever.

If you've read this far: thank you, and I hope this was useful and worth your time. This took ages to write, but I decided to keep it free from the paywall because I think it's important that everyone really should understand – to the best of my meager ability to convey – what I believe is occurring in the world today. So if there is anyone you think ought to read this, then please: share it with them. And if you also believe this is important, please consider becoming a paid subscriber and leaving a comment below. I truly appreciate all your support.

And if you happen to be wondering after reading all this: "Ok, but what is to be done?" – don't worry. As I'll elaborate more in a separate post soon, this Substack will now be pivoting to that question as its main subject moving forward. So if you're interested in that, why not go ahead and subscribe?

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[1] I am here and throughout drawing and synthesizing from James Burnham, George Orwell, Samuel T. Francis, Christopher Lasch, and Bertrand de Jouvenel, among other great observers of the managerial revolution and its consequences.

[2] The use of "bourgeoisie" and "bourgeois" here refers to the middle class of early-to-mid industrialization; this may be confusing, since "bourgeois" is today often used to refer to the spoiled post-industrial upper-middle class – i.e. the college-educated managerial "laptop" class that has by now largely superseded and marginalized the old middle class, which became the lower-middle or "working class" in America today. But for simplicity's sake I decided to nonetheless use the same terminology that the authors mentioned in the previous footnote have tended to employ.

[3] "*Intelligentsia*" originated in 19th century Russia and from the start was used to define something very different from "intellectuals." To be an "*intelligent*" (a member of the intelligentsia) was to adopt a specific *identity* as part of a new enlightened revolutionary class. As Gary Saul Morrison [explains](), "if by 'intellectual' one means a curious person thinking for himself or herself, then *intelligent* was close to its opposite... An *intelligent* signed on to a set of beliefs regarded as totally certain, scientifically proven, and absolutely obligatory for any moral person. A strict *intelligent* had to subscribe to some ideology – whether populist, Marxist, or anarchist – that was committed to the total destruction of the existing order and its replacement by a utopia that would, at a stroke, eliminate every human ill." (Morrison also relays a wonderful quip by Mikhail Gershenzon that, "in Russia an almost infallible gauge of the strength of an artist's genius is the extent of his hatred for the intelligentsia.")

[4] Hard managerial regimes also – as any old-school Marxist will surely protest – reject dematerialization, at least in their own rhetoric. But in truth their attempts to both universally control all resources and to relentlessly impose abstract ideological theory onto reality mean that in practice they actually don't do so at all. They become creatures of pure theory in the end.

[5] While governor of New Jersey, Wilson enthusiastically campaigned for and signed into law a bill to forcibly sterilize all "the hopelessly defective and criminal classes." His chief eugenicist, who drafted the law, was Dr. Edwin Katzen-Ellenbogen, who later worked for the Nazis at Buchenwald, where he killed at least 1,000 prisoners via lethal injection.

[6] Wilson was also inauspiciously the first Ph.D. and first university president (of Princeton, 1902-1910) to be elected. Worse, he was also President of the American Political Science Association (1909-1910).

[7] He was also the monster who originally came up with "Meatless Mondays."

[8] Though Mao would later denounce Dewey and his progressive theories for being reformist rather than sufficiently revolutionary.

[9] As recorded in Frank Dikotter, *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution 1945-1957* (2013).

[10] Jung Chang and John Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (2006)

[11] When neo-Marxists and critical theorists of the 1960s like Paulo Freire advocated seizing the schools to provide "an extraordinary instrument to help build a new society and a new man," they didn't really have to import any new, foreign ideas from Marxism to make the case… America was already steeped in its own nearly identical traditions of progressive educational managerialism.

[12] Because it proved so directly relevant, I'm stealing a lot here from Crawford's excellent and entertaining essay in UnHerd on the revolutionary therapeutic state, so I strongly encourage you to read that in full: https://unherd.com/2022/12/the-politics-of-masturbation/

[13] *Apparatchik* (аппара́тчик): a full-time, professional functionary of the Soviet bureaucracy, or the *apparat* ("the apparatus"). Because they were frequently transferred between different posts and areas of responsibility, with little to no actual practical training in doing anything in particular, the term apparatchik, or "agent of the apparatus" was generally the only possible description that could be found for such a person's vocation.

[14] I've waffled over this myself, writing in "No, the Revolution Isn't Over" that Wokeism should perhaps not be called "revolutionary" because it didn't really aim to replace the elite and their system. But on reflection I'd say that yes, it does indeed deserves to be called revolutionary, as in practice most revolutions actually serve, if not the elite writ large, then one faction of the elite against another.

[15] It is certainly possible to argue as some have that managerialism is, along with basically the entirety of modernity, definitively left-wing in nature, while the actual right has been practically extinct since the French Revolution. But the argument is really beyond the scope of this essay, and to be honest would I think trying to address it would only confuse the matter at hand. So I've stuck with more common definitions of left vs. right.

[16] Not coincidentally, center vs. periphery politics in the West is now also literal, almost universally featuring the conflict between geographic metropolitan centers vs. their

peripheral rural and suburban "hinterlands."

[17] During the run-up to the Spanish Civil War, for example, the "center-left" Republican government (which saw itself as the protector of moderate liberal-democracy) became so paranoid about the perceived threat from the "extremes" (read: the right, which it blamed for the greater violence of the far left) that it began to take increasingly extra-constitutional actions to exclude the opposition from political participation in the name of defending democracy. This only served to delegitimize democracy and help precipitate a crisis that destroyed the state.

[18] As of April 2023, at least 41 national emergencies declared by the US federal government were in effect, some decades old, each having been renewed annually by the president.

[19] China has a wonderful old idiom to describe the situation of people ignoring reality and lying to signal loyalty to the party line: *zhilu weima* (指鹿為馬), or literally to "point at a deer and call it a horse." It derives from a story of a malevolent prime minister who, in order to find out who would remain loyal to him during a treasonous plot, brings a deer into the emperor's court and declares it to be a horse. All those courtiers who agree that the deer is definitely a horse he knows will obey him in anything, while those who laugh and point out that it's obviously a deer he has executed.

[20] Fun fact: China's police big data surveillance system is literally named "Skynet."

[21] In fact, to ever be able to cross the road, amid cars and bikes that never stopped, one had to learn the rituals of a sort of established cultural dance: wait for one car to pass; causally walk through traffic to the center line; stand with everyone else in the middle of the road; wait for the right timing to cross the rest of the way, cars zipping behind you. This dance was finely tuned: cars that actually slowed down near the pedestrians standing in the middle of the road provoked irritation from everyone, as they were disrupting the smooth and predictable timing of the crossing flow.

[22] Just wait until the brain-machine interface chips are ready…

[23] I honestly can't believe this is a sentence I had to write.

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N.S. Lyons ✔ Aug 3 ✒ Author

I'll get an audio version of this up as soon as I can. That's a bit complicated when it's this long. Also, a question for readers: if this was formatted into a short e-book (or book) would you buy it?

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26 replies by N.S. Lyons and others

Dr. K Aug 3   ❤ Liked by N.S. Lyons

This is some of the best reading I have had for a long time...worth all the effort you put into it. But I was especially glad for the post-note...my question as I got increasingly depressed seeing the ugliness exposed was "What can we do?" or is it too late?

So I look forward with great anticipation to the follow ons. Hope they do not take as long...I have thirst to be slaked, now.

Many thanks for this massive effort.

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